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JAMES LACKINGTON (1746–1815) AND READING IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the history of reading in the eighteenth century by examining the impact of reading on the life and work of the bookseller James Lackington. It illustrates the transformative power of reading in the period, its ability radically to alter the life of a man of humble birth. It presents a detailed analysis of Lackington's two autobiographies, *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (1791), and the later and neglected *Confessions of J. Lackington* (1804). The numerous quotations they contain become the basis in the thesis for a detailed reconstruction of Lackington's reading. These two texts also provide evidence of Lackington's use of literary tools such as review journals, miscellanies and dictionaries, and the thesis here builds upon the work of Barbara Benedict, Leah Price, Antonia Foster and others to trace his developing confidence as consumer and distributor of texts. It uncovers the crucial role played by Methodism in Lackington's reading career and documents his complex relationship to the religion of his youth, which he rejects in favour of freethinking only to return to it in later life. The thesis is also concerned to explore the relationship between reading and identity in the eighteenth century. It discusses the way in which Lackington employs reading in his autobiographies to construct a new identity compatible with his social aspirations, and it considers his attempts to influence the choices of the reading public both in his autobiographies and, as a bookseller, by designing sales catalogues to appeal to and aid inexperienced readers in their buying choices. Unlike previous studies, it examines the whole of Lackington's life, not just his bookselling years, and in so doing gives a fuller account of the rich and complex relationship between religion and reading in this period. Lackington, it is argued, was an extraordinary reader himself, as well as an inspirational seller of books and promoter of reading in others.

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Abbreviations

M *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington*
 Memoirs of the Forty-Five First Years of the Life of James Lackington

Unless otherwise stated all references to this work in the text will be taken from 'A New Edition' dated 1794; all other editions will be referred to by their date.

C *The Confessions of J. Lackington*

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the reading of the eighteenth-century bookseller and autobiographer, James Lackington. It will argue that learning to read was the single most important event in the life of this autodidactic self-publicist, enabling him to transform himself from a journeyman shoe-maker into a successful businessman. Reading was central to the way that Lackington constructed an identity which allowed him to navigate the choppy waters of class and commerce. He used his own experience to shape the reading of others by bringing new readers to the market for books. Finally, in a time of reaction and fear, Lackington turned to reading, albeit of a very different kind, to right the ills he saw in the world.

The last thirty years have seen a surge in interest in the history of reading, much of it building on Richard Altick's ground-breaking investigation into *The English Common Reader* (1957).¹ Central to this interest is a curiosity about how ideas are transmitted via the printed or written text. The history of reading is a sub-discipline within the broader history of the book which, as D. F. McKenzie has defined it, concerns itself with the 'sociology of texts'. This includes observing 'the human motives and interactions which texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission, and consumption' whilst also recognising 'the roles of institutions, and their own complex structures, in affecting the forms of social discourse past and present'.² The particular interactions of interest to historians of reading include those which influence the physical form a book takes; the means by which it is published and distributed; the forces – economic, political and social –

¹ Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998).

² D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 15.

which accelerate or impede its transmission; its reception by readers; and its influence on an individual or community. The institutions which feature prominently include printers' workshops, bookshops, newspaper offices, libraries, the various forms of social media, as well as schools, religious establishments and departments of government and state control.

In dealing with so broad a topic, some studies, including this thesis, adopt a micro-historical approach by examining the actions, practices and experiences of an individual reader. A well-known example of this approach is the article by Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy" which casts light on the active nature of the reading of one scholar working for the Earl of Leicester in the sixteenth century.³ Harvey is presented as an exceptional reader, whose 'strenuous attentiveness' to the interpretation of classical texts plays an important role in shaping and justifying the political and diplomatic decisions of his employer.⁴

Alternatively, for a macro-historical approach, we might look at Elizabeth Eisenstein's expansive history, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (1979), which explores the particular ways in which the advent of print forged new types of group identities by disseminating ideas more widely and standardising texts, and thus, Eisenstein argues, influencing the development of the Reformation in Europe.⁵

Robert Darnton unites elements of both these approaches in *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, his investigation into what was read in France during the eighteenth century. He sets out to question the influential claims

³ Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy", *Past & Present*, 129 (1990), 30–78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

of Daniel Mornet who in 1910 suggested that very few copies of Rousseau's politically provocative *Social Contract* were actually read in France during the years leading up to 1789. Mornet had based this on a count of index cards in private libraries, but, as Darnton points out, these were unreliable because they could be subject to self-censorship and obfuscation. He adopts a different methodology, scrutinising the surviving records of the *Société typographique de Neuchâtel*, a publisher and wholesaler which supplied the French market with books from Switzerland. Darnton's work uncovers evidence of large numbers of 'bad' books such as banned philosophical treatises, pornography, and pornographic-philosophical blends, which were smuggled into France, circulated and read.⁶

Darnton uses the findings derived from his intensive study of these records to explore the relationship between books, ideas and cultural trends. His diagrammatic depictions of the interchange of ideas and influences in any 'communications circuit' provide a useful model of the numerous reciprocal exchanges that take place in the various stages of transmission from an 'author' to a 'reader' (see Figure 1). Input, influence and alteration can impinge upon the product at numerous stages of its evolution.⁷ By the 1770s, Darnton concludes, various *livres philosophiques* and *libelles* had permeated French society. The philosophical works offered an alternative system of ideas and values to those endorsed by the *Ancien Regime* whilst the circulation of slanderous pamphlets directed against members of the court gradually and inevitably undermined the authority of the regime. The unsettling influence of these publications provided the social context for revolution.⁸

⁶ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York and London: Norton, 1996), pp. xvii–xxiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 182–4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, see chapters 7 and 8, pp. 181–216.

Figure 1: Robert Darnton's Communications Circuits

Darnton's findings show that rather than seeking to establish a simple relationship between the causes and effects of reading particular types of books, we should dig deeper into patterns of behaviour, the details of cultural transmission, accident, and chance. The very process of examining modes of transmission, rather than ideas themselves, can throw up practical considerations, logistical complications and other disturbances to the neat certainties offered by over-arching theories. By undertaking detailed analyses of individual readers, reading records, or particular genres of books we often bring forth anomalies which disrupt attempts to make generalisations about reading trends. One example of this can be found in challenges to Rolf Engelsing's proposition that readers in Europe moved from a pattern of reading intensively the few books to which they had access, to one in which they read extensively as more books became available. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier argue that there were many examples of extensive readers during the so-called 'intensive' reading period. Indeed, Gabriel Harvey is one such extensive reader. Cavallo and Chartier point out that, even as books became more accessible, many readers read their favourite novels devotedly and intensively.⁹ As we shall see, Lackington is an example of a reader who read both intensively and extensively during different periods of his life.

Engelsing's theory emerged from a desire to understand what impact the huge increase in the number of books being produced in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had on the population of Europe. James Raven, however, has cautioned historians not to equate greater numbers of books in circulation with greater numbers of readers.¹⁰ William St Clair has investigated the economics of

⁹ Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 24–6.

¹⁰ James Raven, 'New Reading Histories, Print Culture and the Identification of Change: The Case of Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History*, 23 (1998), 268–287 (p. 272).

book production and distribution, showing how pricing influenced what was read and how it was read.¹¹ David Vincent and Jonathan Rose have uncovered the ways in which access to education has made an impact on book consumption, particularly amongst working-class readers.¹²

Of vital importance to these studies are the individual historical records which inform our understanding of what people read, how they selected books, and what they felt about their reading. Writing as recently as 2004, St Clair compared the evolution of the history of reading to ‘the stage of astronomy before telescopes, economics before statistics, heavily reliant on a few commonly repeated traditional narratives and favourite anecdotes’. What the discipline lacked, in his view, was the ‘spade-work of basic empirical research, quantification, consolidation, and scrutiny of primary information’.¹³ Diaries, letters, memoirs and inventories all provide glimpses into past interactions between books and readers. Since its foundation in 1996, the *Reading Experience Database* has collected over 30,000 examples of these points of contact, providing a critical mass of data to help us to answer these questions.¹⁴ However, as the work of Darnton, or St Clair, or Grafton and Jardine demonstrates, any mass of historical data still requires the painstaking skill of the scholar to perform the ‘spade work’ and to interpret it.

This thesis is particularly concerned with reading in the eighteenth century, an age in which a few businessmen were able to make fortunes from selling books.¹⁵ Traditional patterns of copyright ownership were swept away when, in 1774, the

¹¹ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹² See David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), and Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹³ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ See *The Reading Experience Database*, www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED.

¹⁵ See James Raven, *The Business of Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 216–7.

House of Lords ruled in the case of *Beckett v. Donaldson* that rights owners could no longer claim to own copyright in perpetuity. This allowed a few bookseller-publishers to exploit literary property formerly controlled by mainly London-based 'congers' or rights-owning conglomerates. St Clair sees this change in intellectual property as having a dramatic effect on book production and pricing, arguing that after 1774 'a huge, previously suppressed, demand for reading was met by a huge surge in the supply of books'.¹⁶ Some of his claims have been disputed by Raven, but it is interesting to note that Lackington emerged as a bookseller in 1774 and built his business on selling books to meet this apparent demand for reading.¹⁷ By the beginning of the nineteenth century, new restrictions on print distribution were introduced as the government reacted to popular unrest in England. Lackington's business life thus coincided with what St Clair terms a 'brief copyright window' from 1774–1808.¹⁸

The eighteenth century is a particularly fertile period for histories of the book and reading. Jan Fergus has analysed the records of the booksellers Clays of Daventry, Rugby, Lutterworth and Warwick and has revealed evidence of purchases made by fifty servants of seventy books or pamphlets over a twenty-one year period. Many of those whose intellectual life she traces left no other record.¹⁹ Stephen Colclough reconstructs the reading of various readers, including a fifteen-year-old apprentice, Joseph Hunter. By studying this young man's diary, Colclough reveals the strategies he employed to gain access to books, and presents examples of

¹⁶ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 115.

¹⁷ Raven suggests that changes in British publishing result from a more complex and longer development. He argues that St Clair relies too heavily on evidence linked to imaginative literature, and particularly to poetic and dramatic anthologies, whilst overlooking production of scholarly, scientific, political and technical writing. See *The Business of Books*, pp. 231–2.

¹⁸ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 54.

¹⁹ Jan Fergus, 'Provincial Servants' Reading in the Late Eighteenth-Century', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 202–25.

his reading choices.²⁰ John Brewer, too, in his work on the records of Anna Larpent, throws light upon how an individual reader selected books. Brewer, who aims to restore the distinctive voice of this active reader and diarist, shows her to be a 'bold and stringent' critic.²¹

These studies uncover a wealth of detail about how their subjects encountered texts. Often they expose problems faced by readers. For example, Hunter's diary shows that he had to wait to read the books he had read about in review journals until they became available from libraries, or until he had enough money to buy them. Larpent, who is shown to be perceptive and discerning, nevertheless found it difficult to define herself as a reader within the narrow role prescribed for women. Fergus identifies problems in proving exactly who read some of the books collected by the servants she studies. She does find examples of some, like David Prowett, who subscribed to journals which suggests that he was indeed the reader of these publications.

All of these studies prompt further questions about readerships and invite scholarly responses. David Allan explores the history of Georgian book clubs and reading societies set up by those with a taste for reading who could not afford the high prices charged for some books. In some instances the joining fee and annual subscription deterred poorer members of society from enjoying the benefits of these groups but they allowed many readers the chance to access books.²² Mark Towsey

²⁰ Stephen M. Colclough, 'Procuring Books and Consuming Texts: The Reading Experience of a Sheffield Apprentice, 1798', *Book History* 3 (2000), 21–44. See also *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities 1695–1870* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²¹ John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent's Reading', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, pp. 226–45.

²² David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008).

shows how less formal book borrowing from country houses was common practice amongst many in Scottish communities in the eighteenth century.²³

Raven sounds a note of caution, warning that as historians we need to be careful when making broad assumptions based on individual reading experiences. He calls for 'reflective, careful engagement with available sources, and, in order to isolate changing reading processes and attitudes towards them, consideration of the broadest possible range of historical approaches to questions of reading.'²⁴ Raven is particularly concerned about assumptions made on the basis of 'cannibalised' personal narratives, which suck useful facts from sources without setting them within their historical context. He suggests that accounts of reading given by Thomas Holcroft and William Cobbett have been taken too readily to build an impression of a march of progress at the turn of the nineteenth century, without taking into account the particular agenda of these writers.²⁵

So how does a study of Lackington's reading fit within and contribute to current scholarship? The first point to note is that evidence of his reading is abundant. He wrote two autobiographies which are filled with evidence of ways that he read and which contain information about what he read. One, the *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (1791), has already, according to Raven, been 'ransacked for details of the London book trade, 1775–1800, particularly for questions of readership, the circulation of books and the types of

²³ Mark Towsey, "'The Talent Hid in a Napkin': Castle Libraries in Eighteenth-Century Scotland", in *The History of Reading: Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750-1950*, ed. by Katie Halsey and W. R. Owens (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 15–31.

²⁴ Raven, 'New Reading Histories', p. 272.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

books bought and read.²⁶ The other, *The Confessions of J Lackington* (1804), has, by contrast, attracted very little attention from scholars. This later account of his reading was written with a very different agenda from that which prompted his *Memoirs* and so provides an interesting counterpoint to the claims he makes in his earlier book.

One of the most striking features of both of these books is the number of quotations they contain. One writer reviewing the *Memoirs* a century after it was written reflected on this phenomenon:

The fearful quotations are certainly a 'weariness and vexation of spirit.' The amount of pains taken to hunt up apposite sentences is truly appalling to contemplate, for it cannot surely be that any man could carry in his memory the immense number of lines scattered through the three hundred odd pages, and could skip from Dryden to Della Crusca so easily.²⁷

It was not only this Victorian reviewer who was struck by the quotations. Isaac D'Israeli also alluded to Lackington's ability to quote, remarking of Gilbert Wakefield that he 'can recollect as great a number of quotations in Greek verse, as Mr Lackington seems to have known in English'.²⁸ That this feature of his writing excited comment prompts us to ask why Lackington included so many excerpts of

²⁶ James Raven, 'Selling One's Life: James Lackington, Eighteenth-Century Booksellers and the Design of Autobiography' in *Writers, Books and Trade: An Eighteenth-Century English Miscellany for William B. Todd*, ed. by O.M. Brack (New York: AMS Press, 1994), pp. 1–23. (p. 7). For further accounts of Lackington, see Richard G. Landon, 'Small Profits Do Great Things: James Lackington and Eighteenth-Century Bookselling', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 5 (1976) 387–99; Frances M. Honour, 'James Lackington, Proprietor, Temple of the Muses', *The Journal of Library History, Philosophy, and Comparative Literature*, 3 (1967), 211–224; Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader*, particularly chapter 2; Margaret Willes *Reading Matters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 8; William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*; and the various early accounts of Lackington's life published in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century such as George Paston, *Little Memoirs of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1901); Edward Marston, *Sketches of Booksellers of Other Days* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co, 1901); R. A. Davenport, *Individuals Who Raised Themselves from Poverty to Eminence or Fortune* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1841); Paul Hollister, *The Author's Wallet* (New York: R. H. Macy, 1934); Charles Knight, *Shadows of the Old Booksellers* (London: Peter Davies, 1927), Thomas Cooper, *Triumphs of Perseverance and Enterprise Recorded as Examples for the Young* (London: Darton and Co, 1860).

²⁷ 'The Father of Cheap Literature', *Bow Bells* (1893), 463–64.

²⁸ Isaac D'Israeli, *Vaurien: or Sketches of the Times*, (London: Cadell, Davies, Murray, Highley, 1797), VI, p. 143. D'Israeli refers to the author as 'John Lackington'.

writing from other sources. What do these quotations tell us about the value he placed on literature, or the way that one reader processed written texts? Can we reconstruct Lackington's reading from the thousand or so fragments he inserts into his prose? Searchable collections of English literature such as ECCO and EEBO offer a useful resource to researchers seeking to answer such questions and my own searches have yielded some surprising and interesting results.

One feature of Lackington's life which has not been given sufficient examination is his Methodist youth. He was to return to Methodism in his old age and it was a dominant influence on his life. His urge to learn to read came from listening to religious arguments whilst he was an apprentice and he profited during his early years as a reader from supplies of books disseminated by John Wesley. As Isabel Rivers has written, relatively little work has been done by book historians, as opposed to historians of Methodism, on Wesley as a producer and distributor of books.²⁹ John Feather notes the 'unceasing flow' of religious literature through the century and identifies Methodist books in particular as a 'significant part of provincial publishing'.³⁰ The ubiquity of these publications invites scholarly attention and Lackington provides an interesting example of a man whose life chances were significantly improved by the access to reading afforded him after his conversion to Methodism:

I perhaps ought also to observe, that if I had never heard the Methodists preach, in all probability I should have been at this time a poor, ragged, dirty cobbler, peeping out from under a bulk with a snuffy nose and a long beard. (C., p. 180)

This study of Lackington will also contribute to our knowledge of reading in the eighteenth century because of the places he occupies on Darnton's

²⁹ Isabel Rivers, 'William Law and Religious Revival: The Reception of *A Serious Call*', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 17 (2008), 633-649 (p. 643).

³⁰ John Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 38.

'communication circuit'. Lackington participated in the circulation of books in London from 1774–98 as a reader, an author and a bookseller. He also packaged special deals for libraries, intervened in the destruction of remaindered books, published books, wrote catalogues, and advertised his products in newspapers. Darnton emphasises the importance of the bookseller's shop as 'a place where supply met demand and books came into the hands of readers.'³¹ As a bookseller specialising in cheap books, it was in Lackington's interests to try to boost trade amongst new readers and there is evidence in his *Memoirs*, and in his bookselling catalogues, that he actively sought new markets for his books.

Any study of Lackington's life encounters a number of challenges. Many primary sources for information about his life are lost. Therefore, although he provides an engaging account of his reading life in his autobiographies, it is hard to verify all the claims he makes about his own success. Where possible, this thesis compares his statements about books with those of other readers and other booksellers. It analyses evidence to be found in existing records, such as his will, bookselling catalogues, a few letters, and various promotional illustrations of his shop. It also draws upon accounts by contemporaries and newspaper articles.

As already noted, it is important to remember that the *Memoirs* was written with the intention of boosting sales of books.³² *The Confessions*, on the other hand, sells Methodism quite as urgently. Autobiographies present historians with very specific challenges. George Gusdorf points to the peculiar unreliability of these documents, writing that their authors are 'not engaged in an objective and

³¹ Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, p. 184.

³² See Raven, 'Selling One's Life', p. 13.

disinterested pursuit but in a work of personal justification'.³³ James Olney emphasises the way autobiographies create meaning by forging links between sometimes disparate elements. This 'simultaneously organises the self into a new and richer entity; so that the old known self is joined to and transformed into the new, the heretofore unknown self'. In other words, the 'self' created at the moment of writing is not necessarily the same 'self' which engaged in past actions. The process of writing one's life calls for a process of ordering, selection, and reviewing which, intentionally or not, leads to the building of a 'monument of the self'.³⁴ As Sidonie Smith observes, we need to 'adjust our expectations of the truth in self-referential writing'.³⁵

The examination of Lackington's reading that follows begins by presenting a brief account of his life and his writing. Chapter 1 adumbrates key events in the three principal phases of his life: his Methodist youth which was spent training and working as a shoemaker in the West Country; his middle years as an apostate and free-thinker working as a bookseller in London; and his retirement in Somerset and later Devon, a Methodist once more. Each of these periods was marked by marriage to different women and was devoted to very different types of reading.

Chapter 2 looks more closely at Lackington's Methodist reading as a young man. It argues that like many others in England who embraced Methodism, Lackington benefited from explicit encouragement to develop the habit of devotional reading. He was also able to access religious books distributed through

³³ George Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', trans. James Olney, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28–48 (p. 39).

³⁴ James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 35.

³⁵ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2010), p. 15.

Wesley's extensive network, which allowed him to read intensively. As we shall see, Lackington's choice of books during this period was very much determined by cost. He appears to have read mainly old books, bought second hand. Newer books were beyond his limited means but also, as Andrew Cambers has observed, religious practices were often slow to change and the godly tended to study older books, 'sold and resold, as they passed through families and religious communities'.³⁶

After moving to London, Lackington's faith was shaken and he read more widely, selecting books by free-thinking writers that he had previously shunned. Chapter 3 examines his embrace of enlightenment ideas and illustrates just how far he had moved beyond John Wesley's constraining Christian Library. By examining quotations found in the *Memoirs*, I show that Lackington became an enthusiastic supporter of Voltaire and had read some of the more controversial essays of David Hume.

Chapter 4 looks at how Lackington used his reading to build a new identity for himself to accommodate his social aspirations. It illustrates the way in which he began to 'possess' what he read, internalising it and adapting it. This contributes to our understanding of one of most elusive aspects of the history of reading identified by Darnton:

Although we have some information about the external circumstances of eighteenth-century reading, we can only guess at its effects on the hearts and minds of the readers. Inner appropriation – the ultimate stage in the communication circuit that linked authors and publishers with booksellers and readers – may remain beyond the range of research.³⁷

Searchable databases provide the means to identify, examine and compare the quotations collected by Lackington. Close scrutiny of these quotations provides

³⁶ Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading, Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.18.

³⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, p. 85.

evidence of some of the literary tools Lackington used to furnish his autobiographies with a conspicuous display of literary knowledge. These provide further evidence to support the findings of Barbara Benedict and Leah Price on the ways in which eighteenth-century readers used poetic miscellanies and anthologies.

The thesis next examines the influence of Lackington on wider developments in reading in the eighteenth century. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the methods he used to reach out to readers rich and poor with his offer of cheap books at low prices. Chapter 5 argues that Lackington carefully constructs an identity aimed to encourage poor men like his younger self – ambitious artisans – to better themselves through reading. Chapter 6, meanwhile, provides evidence taken from his capacious bookselling catalogues which supports this argument and shows how Lackington drew upon his own experience to guide readers in their book buying.

The final chapters turn to Lackington's reaction against the very impulses which prompted him to promote knowledge amongst the working classes. They show him to have been beset by fears about the political turmoil gripping the nation and guilty at his role in contributing to the condition of 'infidelity' he sees all around him. As Chapter 8 demonstrates, Lackington refused to abandon his faith in reading. He turned again to books – this time to sermons, the Bible, and religious commentaries – to cure the ills of the nation.

These final chapters draw upon a wealth of previously overlooked evidence found in *The Confessions*. They investigate a battle for readers, as revolutionary and counter-revolutionary influences within book production and distribution confronted each other. Chapter 8, in particular, looks at new modes of reading adopted by Lackington, showing that he returned to a more intensive approach to consuming books. He used reading to forge closer social bonds, but he had lost

none of his zeal in urging others to read for their own well-being. In these later years, books became for Lackington a tool for spiritual, as opposed to social or economic, development.

Chapter One

LIFE AND WRITING

Lackington writes in his *Memoirs* that he was born on '31st of August, (old style) 1746' in Wellington, Somerset to parents George and Joan (*M.*, p. 38).¹ He describes his father's family as prosperous farmers who disapproved of the marriage of their son George to Joan Trott, the daughter of a poor weaver. Parish records from St John's Church, Wellington, show that the couple married on 9 June 1746 when the bride would presumably have been heavily pregnant.

Another document, which is perhaps more revealing, suggests that the cause of family tensions may have had deeper roots than George's choice of bride.

Records show that in January 1735, 'the keeper of Taunton Gaol is required to receive George Lackington, apprentice to William Hurley of Wellington, cordwainer [or shoemaker], who is charged with being a loose, idle and disorderly boy and for running away and deserting his master's service. Lackington is also charged with stealing two pairs of shoes.'² We do not hear George's account of this affair but his behaviour whilst an apprentice is consistent with the portrait his son was to give many years later of a father who drank heavily, abandoned his (large) family and thus contributed to the straightened circumstances which

¹ References to *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* or *Memoirs of the Forty-Five First Years of the Life of James Lackington* as it was retitled in 1793, will be taken from the 1794 'New Edition' unless stated otherwise and will be given in the text. His care in specifying 'old style' is explained by the fact that, after the passing of the Calendar Act in 1752 which imposed the Gregorian (rather than Julian) calendar upon England, Lackington celebrated his birthday on 11 September as he tells readers on p. 130.

² 20 January 1735, Session Roll For Easter 1735–Epiphany 1736, Somerset County Record Office, Q/SR/303/30.

resulted in James having to cut short his rudimentary education at the local dame school (*M.*, p. 45).

George does, however, redeem himself in this account by bringing about a meeting which was to change his son's life (*M.*, p. 72). At some point around 1760, James was apprenticed to George and Mary Bowden, shoemakers of Taunton. The young Lackington was fortunate to find training in his father's craft of shoemaking amongst a family who provided him with an education, access to a few books, and the bodily comforts which allowed him to thrive and develop intellectually for the next seven years. Lackington seems to have remembered his years in Taunton with affection. As late as 1803–4, he was still in contact with 'Mr. D' (Mr. Dingle), 'a very old acquaintance' who had been a journeyman whilst he was an apprentice and who later married Mary Bowden and made her 'an excellent husband' (*C.*, p 39). I will return to the Bowden family's contribution to Lackington's reading life in greater detail in the next chapter but it should be noted that it was whilst living with them in Taunton that Lackington learnt to read with help from their younger son, John, and was encouraged to attend Methodist meetings by the older boy, George. The importance of the Bowden legacy on the young apprentice cannot be over-stated.

Lackington left the Bowden family in 1767, a few months before his apprenticeship expired. He moved to Bristol where he lodged at the house of a Mr. James with fellow shoemaker, John Jones. The two men enjoyed a productive working relationship. In Jones, Lackington met a 'secretary' who could write down the ballads which he had started to compose and a friend whom he persuaded to share his interests in reading and Methodism (*M.*, p. 151). Jones's brother and sister soon joined them and together they formed an effective

working community which I will explore in the next chapter. When this group broke up, Lackington went to work for John Taylor of Kingsbridge, bringing with him some experience of making sought-after stuff and silk shoes (*M.*, p. 175). Taylor prompted him to learn to write, and by imitating letters whenever he could, Lackington was able to perfect a readable hand (*M.*, pp. 176–77). It is perhaps a testament to his gratitude to Taylor that he remembered him in his will.³ Once again, at the end of his life, Lackington looked back fondly on this mentor who had helped him as a young man. This aspect of his character is frequently overlooked perhaps because his attack on Methodism in his *Memoirs* and the self-assured tone of this book have led some readers and critics to see him as self-promoting and lacking in gratitude.⁴

In 1770 Lackington married a fellow Methodist and dairy maid, Nancy Smith, in St Peter's Church, Bristol (*M.*, p. 190). After struggling to make a living in the south west, the couple moved to London. In August 1774, with 'two shillings and sixpence' in his pocket, Lackington found lodgings and work with help from his Methodist contacts (*M.*, p. 200). Fellow shoemaker, Job Heath, who owned a shoe warehouse, supplied him with plenty of work and somewhere to live.⁵ Lackington next presented his 'Class' and 'Band' tickets to the Methodist community at John Wesley's Foundry and was received into a 'Band'. Methodists were divided into groups according to their spiritual status. 'Classes', or local groups of about twelve members, gathered regularly to nurture 'godly

³ 'I give and bequeath unto John Taylor now or late of Plymouth in the county of Devon Cordwainer with whom I formerly lived for some time the sum of twenty pounds', James Lackington's Will, 3 September 1814, National Archives, prob. 11/1578.

⁴ See Edward Marston, *Sketches of Booksellers of Other Days* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1901), p. 154 and R.A. Davenport, *Lives of Individuals Who Raised Themselves From Poverty to Eminence or Fortune* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1841), p. 238.

⁵ See *Memoirs* 1794, p. 200 for reference to Mr Heath who owned a house in Whitecross Street and who lived in Fore Street. See also Henry Kent, *Kent's Directory for the Year 1771* (London: Kent, 1771), p. 87, for an entry referring to Job Heath in Whitecross Street.

language, temperance, honesty, plainness, seriousness, frugality, diligence, charity, and economic loyalty within the connection'.⁶ 'Bands' were smaller, select groups divided according to gender and marital status. They served a confessional function and were open, according to Lackington, only to 'such as were at least in a justified state' (*M.*, p. 118). Members of each were issued with a much-prized membership ticket.⁷ Lackington would have had to attend weekly 'Band' meetings in order to retain his ticket. He clearly profited from the association. The ease with which he seems to have found work and accommodation were of great practical importance to a stranger in London but so too was the companionship provided by a community of like-minded individuals. In Lackington's case, these companions proved extremely supportive over the next two years. They helped him in his business as well as his spiritual life, in sickness and in health. Mr. Wheeler, a rope-maker of Old Street, Mr. Boyd, and Messrs. Bottomley and Shaw, carpenters of Bunhill Row were remembered with gratitude by Lackington (*M.*, pp. 251–52). After establishing himself in London, he brought Nancy to join him and they began their new life in the capital.

It was in London that Lackington decided to pursue his interest in books. A fellow Methodist, Mr Boyd, alerted him to a vacant shop for rent in Featherstone Street and helped him to acquire a bag of old books – 'chiefly divinity' – and Lackington went into business on Midsummer Day 1774 (*M.*, p. 217). He reasoned that he knew as much about books as the owner of a nearby bookshop, but more importantly, 'I farther observed, that I loved books, and that if I could but be a bookseller, I should then have plenty of books to read, which was the

⁶ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire Of The Spirit* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 78.

⁷ For further information on 'Classes' and 'Bands', see Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 78–79; and *Memoirs*, pp. 114–122.

greatest motive I could conceive to induce me to make the attempt' (*M.*, p. 216). Trade apparently flourished and in 1775 Lackington took a lease on a shop and parlour at number 46 Chiswell Street, assisted by a loan from John Wesley's Foundry Lending Stock, established in 1746 (*M.*, p. 221). This was another example of the support which the Lackingtons received from the Foundry, the social and religious hub around which their lives revolved during these years. Wesley had established not only a religious meeting place, but a school, a dispensary, alms houses, and a book room.⁸

The couple were to require Methodist assistance once more when they contracted severe illnesses in September 1775. This killed Nancy and left her husband unable to work. His business was saved only by the care and prompt action of Methodist friends who locked up the shop to save the stock. After two years living and worshipping in the orbit of the Foundry, life was to change for Lackington. A few years earlier, whilst in Bristol, John Wesley had predicted within Lackington's hearing that he could never keep a bookseller in his flock for more than six months, pointing out 'the danger that attended close reasoning in matters of religion and spiritual concerns, in reading controversies, &c' (*M.*, pp. 265–66). This proved to be all too true in Lackington's case. He began to read outside the narrow field of religious books and before long he transferred the devotion he had once applied to his spiritual reading to secular works.

On 30 January 1776 Lackington was married by licence at St Luke's Church, Old Street, to Dorcas Turton. He was attracted perhaps by the kindness this school mistress had shown to Nancy during her final illness and by her dutiful care of her father. Dorcas had other attractions for Lackington as well. She

⁸ For further information on the Book Room, see Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), p. 235.

owned the premises in Chiswell Street where Lackington had his shop, but perhaps even more importantly, she was 'immoderately fond of books' (*M.*, p. 256). It is no surprise that soon after their union, Lackington describes how his 'mind began to expand, intellectual light and pleasure broke in and dispelled the gloom of fanatical melancholy' (*M.*, pp. 260–61). He had found a companion with whom he could enjoy reading and their marriage, though childless, seems to have been a happy one.

Lackington's business expanded in the years that followed, particularly after John Denis, an 'oilman in Cannon-street' invested £200 which enabled Lackington to double his stock and to publish his first catalogue (*M.*, p. 357).⁹ The *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* carried an advertisement in March 1779 which announced the publication of:

A CATALOGUE of several valuable Libraries and Collections
of Books. In various Languages and most Branches of
Literature which are selling exceeding cheap.
By LACKINGTON and DENIS, Booksellers,
No. 46, Chiswell Street, Moorfields.¹⁰

Lackington relates in his *Memoirs* that the two men disagreed over the rate of purchasing books, and that Denis withdrew from the partnership in March 1780. However, contemporary advertisements show that the story of this business partnership might have been more complicated than Lackington's account

⁹ Lackington spells Denis with one 'n' in his *Memoirs*. Exeter Working Papers in Book History notes 'John Denis' senior and junior, booksellers working from 2 Bridge Street, Blackfriars in records taken from insurance policies, see <http://bookhistory.blogspot.co.uk/2007/01/insurance-names-c-d.html> In its listing of members of London Book Trades, this website lists John Dennis (senior and junior) working from Bridge Street before moving to Middle Row Holborn in 1790, see <http://bookhistory.blogspot.co.uk/2007/01/london-1885--1800-d.html> Lackington left money in his will to 'John Dennis son of John Dennis late of Middle Row Holborn in the county of Middlesex Bookseller' which suggests that this is the same Denis noted in the Exeter Working Papers who styled himself 'bookseller' rather than 'oilman' for insurance purposes in 1779, the year he went into partnership with Lackington. I shall follow Lackington's spelling of Denis henceforth to avoid confusion [websites accessed 9 May 2012].

¹⁰ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, March 1779, issue 15626.

suggests. Denis was developing his own bookselling business during this time with the full knowledge of his partner:

LACKINGTON'S WINTER CATALOGUE. Consisting of Eleven Thousand Volumes in History, Antiquities, Voyages, Travels, Novels, Romances, Poetry, Plays, Arts, Sciences, Physic, Astrology, Alchemy, Palmistry, Calvinistic, Mystic, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Deistical Divinity, &c. which are selling exceeding cheap at his Shop, No. 46, Chiswell-street, Moorfields, where the full Value is given for Libraries or Parcels of Books, or Books exchanged.

Catalogues to be had at the Place of Sale, and of the following Booksellers, Dennis and Son, No. 2, Bridge-street, near Fleet-street; and Manson's, No. 4, Crown-street, St Ann's Soho.¹¹

Gone is the reference to 'Lackington and Denis' here but the selection of books reflects Denis's interest in mystical and alchemical books and suggests that he might have had some influence on the acquisition of stock. Lackington notes that when Denis died 'he left behind him in his private library the best collection of scarce valuable mystical, and alchymical books, that ever was collected by one person' (*M.*, p. 359).

Meanwhile, in December of the same year, an advertisement appears promoting 'John Denis and Son Booksellers' whose catalogues can be obtained from the shop of Mr Lackington, 46 Chiswell Street.¹² By 1781, the dissolution of the partnership is clearly reflected in Lackington's advertisements. His stock has apparently more than doubled and the notice still insists on low prices and value but emphasis has shifted away from mystical books to modern publications, elegant bindings, books in foreign languages, and pamphlets:

LACKINGTON's CATALOGUE of TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND VOLUMES, chiefly in English; a great number in French, many in Latin, Greek, &c. including various modern

¹¹ 'Lloyd's Evening Post, 6-8 October, 1779', in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 14 May 2012]

¹² See 'Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser, 21 December, 1779' in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 14 May 2012]

publications: many in elegant bindings. Also a variety of scarce OLD books, and many thousand Pamphlets. The whole selling at the remarkable low prices, which are printed in the Catalogue.

By J. LACKINGTON,
No. 46, Chiswell-street, Moorfields.¹³

According to Lackington's account the two booksellers continued to be friends until Denis's death on 3 January 1785 (*M.*, p. 361).¹⁴ Each stocked the other's catalogues for a time and Lackington left thirty guineas in his will to Denis's son, also called John, although the younger Denis had died on 23 August 1798, after Lackington had retired and moved out of London.¹⁵

We find evidence of a continued association between the two men in various publishing endeavours. Lackington published more than fifty titles during his time as a bookseller.¹⁶ Many of these were editions of best-sellers such as Thomson's *The Seasons* (1788), *Paradise Lost* (1788), Isaac Watts's *The Improvement of the Mind* (1792 and 1794).¹⁷ He joined other London booksellers in producing multi-volume editions of Shakespeare's plays. We find him publishing works which he had encountered as a young man, such as Nicholas Culpeper's *The English Physician* (1778), Young's *Night Thoughts* (1788), works by John Gay and James Hervey. He published works by Voltaire, books of a religious nature, travels, songbooks, and novels. During the 1780s he joined with Denis, Thomas Mills of Bristol and John Binns of Leeds in publishing various works of a mystical nature translated from German by Francis Okely. These were printed by Thomas Dicey of the family well-known for printing chapbooks,

¹³ 'Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser, 26 May 1781' in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 14 May 2012]

¹⁴ See Exeter Working Papers in Book History <http://bookhistory.blogspot.co.uk/2007/01/berch-d.html> [accessed 9 May 2012]

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See Appendix C for a list of books published by Lackington.

¹⁷ See ESTC. The date of publication refers to the date these titles were published by Lackington.

ballads and woodcuts. By about 1785, this association seems to have come to an end.

The range of titles published by Lackington seems to indicate that he understood the market he was selling to. He undoubtedly benefitted both from the money invested in his business by Wesley's Foundry and by Denis, but, as important to his success was his fresh approach to bookselling. In 1780 he decided to refuse to offer credit to his customers and thereby avoided the crippling level of bad debt which afflicted so many businesses. He bought up large quantities of remaindered books to sell cheap. Neither of these policies was quite as new as he suggests in his *Memoirs*, but they illustrate the decisive ways in which he responded to the various pressures and opportunities offered within his working environment. He was a consummate publicist and placed thousands of advertisements in the press to advise potential customers of new publications, new catalogues from which they could select books, and any changes to his business. His *Memoirs*, too, were undoubtedly intended to publicise his bookshop and catalogues.

The 1780s appear to have been a time of learning and social advancement for Lackington. He writes of his efforts in broadening his education by reading widely, attending the theatre and lectures, and meeting regularly with friends to discuss a range of subjects. In 1781 he joined the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC), a voluntary military body composed of citizens of London who would act as an aid to the civil power when the need arose. The HAC was based in Artillery Gardens which bordered Chiswell Street and admitted 'merchants, traders and professional men, or any other good citizens . . . on a solemn declaration of attachment to the King and the Constitution, and of readiness to join in supporting

the civil authority'.¹⁸ The Prince of Wales was Captain General and members enjoyed regular field days and balls. The company also hosted a series of well publicised balloon ascents.¹⁹ This was a regiment which had glamour and prestige and would have added to Lackington's social status.

The HAC was nonetheless a military unit and it is likely that Lackington joined the company at a time of civil strife which particularly threatened the area around Chiswell Street, including nearby Ropemaker's Alley, Moorfields and Bunhill Row. At the time that he joined, the formerly tight rules of admission were relaxed somewhat in order to absorb members of the bands of volunteers which came together under the command of Sir Barnard Turner to protect areas of London such as Moorfields during the Gordon Riots in June 1780.²⁰ The Riots began on 2 June when Lord George Gordon, president of the Protestant Association, led a vast crowd of petitioners to Parliament to demand that legislation which promised concessions to Catholics should not be passed. When they did not receive a firm commitment to endorse the petition, the crowds decided to take matters into their own hands and marched on prominent Catholic targets.²¹ Over the next four days the increasingly destructive mob attacked Newgate Prison, the King's Bench, and New Bridewell, freeing prisoners, looting and burning. London residents responded to the crisis by organising themselves into groups and patrolling their wards and parishes. When the emergency had passed, these groups of citizens, known as the London Military Foot Association, were brought under the control of the HAC. Lackington is listed as joining the

¹⁸ *The British Volunteer* (London: T. Egerton, 1799), p. 5.

¹⁹ For an account of Vincenzo Lunardi's balloon ascent, see Anthony Highmore, *History of the Honourable Artillery Company* (London: R. Wilks, 1804), pp. 386–87.

²⁰ *A List of the Chiefs, Officers, Court of Assistants, Members, &c of the Honourable Artillery Company in the Year 1786* (London: Stephen Clark, 1786), p. 19.

²¹ See *Whitehall Evening Post*, 1–3 June, 1780.

HAC on the day this assimilation took place. He eventually rose to the rank of 'Second Serjeant' in the Matross Division, which had a special association with the volunteers since it was formed to attend two field guns presented to the HAC by a grateful City of London in recognition of the 'signal services done by them and the gentlemen of the London Military Foot Association, now incorporated with that body in suppressing the dangerous riots in the month of June 1780.'²²

As he approached middle age both Lackington and his shop were gaining notice. When George III recovered his health after the illness which precipitated the 'Regency Crisis' from 1788–1789, London celebrated with a display of illuminations. The *London Chronicle* lists Lackington of Chiswell Street first amongst 'the number of Tradesmen who strove to excel in the brilliancy of their illuminations.'²³ Lackington in his *Memoirs* writes proudly of walking on the esplanade at Weymouth with their Majesties and the four princesses (*M.*, p. 524). The Lackingtons' arrival in Weymouth, together with that of Lord and Lady Chesterfield and family, Lord Grenville, Lord and Lady Digby and forty or so others, was noted in the *Star* on 14 September 1791.²⁴

It is evident that by the 1790s, Lackington had begun to acquire the trappings of gentility. He owned his own carriage and a villa, Spring House, in the village of Merton in Surrey. Insurance records from 1792 show that household goods he kept there were valued at £700, 'wearable apparel' at £100, and printed books at £200.²⁵ This does not include the value of his stock or the £600 worth of

²² Anthony Highmore, *History of the Honourable Artillery Company* (London: R. Wilks, 1804), p. 313.

For further information about Lackington's involvement in the HAC, see Sophie Banks, 'James Lackington and the Honourable Artillery Company', *Notes and Queries*, 58 (2011), 505–507.

²³ *London Chronicle*, 10 March, 1789.

²⁴ *Star*, 14 September, 1791

²⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, Records for 1792, Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Group, CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/386, record 597391.

books he kept in Chiswell Street at the time.²⁶ This not only shows him to be a wealthy man, but, by comparing this record with others, reveals that he owned considerably more books than most of his contemporaries.

In 1793, Lackington sold Robert (or Robin) Allen a quarter share in his business.²⁷ Allen had worked in the shop since he was a boy and knew its operating methods and ethos, leading Lackington to write that 'having been a witness to the profitable effects resulting from small profits, [he] is as much in love with that mode of transacting business as I am' (*M.*, p. 445). This footnote, added to later editions of *Memoirs*, also includes the telling comment: 'I suppose I shall be obliged to take another quarter partner very soon, as I cannot bear to see even trifles neglected.' It is a credit to Allen that he appears to have maintained a successful partnership with the demanding Lackington, for we know that the alliance with Denis was fraught with minor disagreements over the wording of catalogues (*M.*, p. 356). Letters show that Lackington adopted a somewhat hectoring tone towards his former colleagues and his successor, his cousin, George.²⁸

With business flourishing Lackington sought new premises and moved into an impressive building in the south east corner of the newly built Finsbury Square (see Figure 2). The square was designed by George Dance, architect to the City of London, who was heavily influenced by Neo-Classicism whilst living in Italy.²⁹ It promised 'a most eligible residence for the opulent mercantile

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Allen is listed as 'Robin' in his insurance record. See LMA, MS 11936 398, record 642001.

²⁸ In one of his few surviving letters, Lackington berates George for charging him too much for books and for inaccuracy, 'The Arminian mag. [,] 6 vol [,] you sold in letter £1 – 6[,] you charge £1 – 7 – 0 and they want most of the heads [-] one vol has but two left [,] another has four [,] and so on.' See Letter from James Lackington to Lackington and Allen, Cambridge University Library, ANL Munby Papers, ADD 8200.

²⁹ For information about George Dance and to see illustrations of his plans for Finsbury Square, see Jill Lever, with a contribution by Sally Jeffery, *Catalogue of the Drawings of George Dance*

Figure 2: 'Temple of the Muses, Finsbury Square'
by Thomas H Shepherd, engraved by W. Wallis

inhabitants of the metropolis, being very convenient for the Exchange, and situated in the most airy and healthy spot near the principal part of the city for business.³⁰ Insurance records do indeed show that the square was inhabited by prosperous merchants, lawyers and gentry.³¹

Lackington named his new shop 'The Temple of the Muses' and emblazoned over the entrance his slogan, 'Cheapest Bookseller in the World'. On 5 September 1794, *Lloyds Evening Post* reported that a coach and horses had been driven around the interior of the new shop:

Saturday morning, a Mail Coach, with four beautiful blood-horses, belonging to Mr Wilson, of Led Lane, was, in order to decide a wager of 500 guineas, driven round the dome in the New Shop of Messrs. Lackington, Allen and Co. Booksellers, in Finsbury-square by J. Smith, driver of the Royal Weymouth Mail. A great number of Gentlemen attended on the occasion, and the Galleries of the Dome were crowded with spectators – Betts to a very large amount are laid that Pickford's heavy wagon, with ten horses, shall drive into the shop, and turn round in the space to be occupied by its Counter.³²

The stunt, with its 500 guinea wager, crowds of excited attendants and quality bloodstock was brilliantly calculated to draw attention to the new shop.

However, a few months after this spectacle, at the end of January 1795, Dorcas died. She was buried in St Mary's Church, Merton beneath a headstone inscribed with a verse praising her virtues written by her husband. In June the same year, Lackington married Mary Turton, the daughter of a Gloucestershire

the Younger (1741–1815) and of George Dance the Elder (1695–1768) (London: Azimuth Editions on behalf of Sir John Soane's Museum, 2003). Many of these designs can be viewed at the London Metropolitan Archives, COL/AC/16/123 and COL/CCS/PL/02.

³⁰ Catherine Kearsley, *Kearsley's Stranger's Guide or Companion through London & Westminster and the County Round* (London: C & G Kearsley, 1791), p. 79.

³¹ For example Thomas Buckworth at number 14, and Robert Steel, at 31 were merchants; Thomas Willet, at 34 was an 'attorney at law'; and Michael Pope, at 44 and John Butler at the corner of Dean Street and Finsbury Square styled themselves 'gentleman'. See, London Metropolitan Archives, Insurance Records for 1792–93, CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/388.

³² *Lloyds Evening Post*, 5 September 1794 in *17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 14 May 2012]

attorney, William Turton, and a relative of Dorcas.³³ There are many rumours about Mary's past, suggesting that she left an officer at the altar in favour of Lackington, but she appears from *The Confessions* to have been a supportive companion to her husband.³⁴

Lackington finally retired in 1798, handing his share of the business to his cousin, George, who had worked for him since he was thirteen. A letter of 1800 again reflects a querulous tone in Lackington's address to his successor as the two appear to negotiate the price of the premises in Finsbury Square. Lackington eventually concedes:

I certainly shall be glad if you would purchase it and if you are disposed to treat for it I think I should not charge you but above two hundred pound more than it cost me although the trouble I took and the money I saved in building deserve a much greater consideration.

He stresses that he wishes to sell the building since it is too large to leave to any one of his relations and 'to leave to several may cause disputes and lowness'.³⁵ There seems to have been some tension between the two Lackingtons since a series of codicils to James's will make changes to the original document first, in October 1814, making George an executor and his children equal beneficiaries with the children of James's own nieces and nephews, then in January 1815 revoking this.

The Lackingtons moved to Alveston in Gloucestershire near Mary's family after retiring and so began a new period of reading. Lackington spent time with his wife reading books of sermons and, having returned to the West Country, soon

³³ See wedding announcement in *Lloyds Evening Post* 15 – 17 June 1795, in *17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 14 May 2012]

³⁴ See Maria Gibbons, *We Donkeys in Devon* (London: Hamilton Adams & Co, 1885), pp. 4–5. See also an announcement of the marriage of Mary to John Manley 'The bride is 70 and has been led to the Hymeneal altar by her fourth husband. Her first consort was J. Lackington, the celebrated bookseller', *The Manchester Times and Gazette*, 7 February 1835, in *19th Century British Library Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 7 October 2008]

³⁵ Letter from Lackington 1800, Grolier Club.

found his way back to his Methodist roots. In 1803 he wrote *The Confessions of J. Lackington* in which he regretted his years of apostasy and particularly his scathing attacks on Methodism in his *Memoirs*. He began evangelising and built a Methodist Chapel called the 'Temple' near his home. In 1806 Lackington moved to Taunton where he built another 'Temple' in 1808 in Upper Street.³⁶ In a letter discussing the transfer of funds to build the chapel, Lackington wrote:

The above chapel and ground is like to cost me about two thousand pounds, I yesterday laid the foundation stone and put the following notice in a bottle. This chapel was begun June 1808 and built at the sole expense of J Lackington a local preacher among the Methodists . . . in this chapel no seats or pews are to be paid for but to be free for the public, may others follow the example.³⁷

It is interesting to note that Lackington now refers to himself as a Methodist preacher and not as a former bookseller. Perhaps of even more significance was an inscription across the front of this building announcing 'This Temple is erected as a monument of God's mercy in convincing an infidel of the important truths of Christianity. Man, consult thy whole existence, and be safe.'³⁸ Lackington employed the same techniques to publicise his wares that had served him so well in Finsbury. In what appears to be a conscious effort to re-write his past he now sold religion and not books.

In 1812, Lackington moved to Budleigh Salterton in Devon, hoping that the sea air would benefit his failing health. He once again built a chapel, another 'Temple', in order to provide the town with a place of worship nearer than the parish church two miles away in East Budleigh. In doing this, he apparently incurred the displeasure of Lord Rolle, the local landowner. Rolle forbade his

³⁶ See A. N. Walton, 'James Lackington and Methodism in Budleigh Salterton', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 18 (1932), 85–92, (p. 89).

³⁷ Somerset Country Records Office T/PH/gc.

³⁸ Walton, 'James Lackington and Methodism in Budleigh Salterton', p. 90.

tenants from helping the endeavour in any way but Lackington apparently declared 'If the Chapel has to be built of golden sovereigns, it will be built' and he brought in a builder from Exeter.³⁹

Lackington died on 25 November 1815 and was buried in the graveyard of All Saints Church in East Budleigh in a raised grave, covered by a slab bearing the words, 'Sacred to the Memory of James Lackington who died at Budleigh Salterton November 25th 1815 aged 70 years' (see Figure 3). He left no children and was survived by his wife. He left numerous annuities and bequests to members of his family, servants and friends in his will. He also set aside sums to be paid to 'poor persons belonging to the Methodist Society in Wellington' and to the 'Taunton and Somerset Hospital', an annual amount to be paid to 'the Methodist Society in Taunton' and the sum of forty pounds to the Right Honourable Prime Minister of England. It might have pleased Lackington that at least two of his chapels, in Taunton and Budleigh Salterton, although renovated, still stand and are used for worship today. George sold the Temple of the Muses by auction in 1828. It was destroyed by fire in 1841.⁴⁰ The name of 'Lackington' (albeit George, not James) will long be associated with the publication of the first edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or The Modern Prometheus* (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones, 1818).

The two volumes of autobiography left to us by Lackington provide not only an account of his life but a valuable insight into bookselling and reading practices in

³⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴⁰ See *The Morning Chronicle*, 22 February, 1828, for details of the auction and *Freeman's Journal* and *The Morning Chronicle*, 3 February 1841 in *17th 18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 7 October 2008]

Figure 3: The grave of James Lackington, All Saints Church, East Budleigh

Figure 4: Copy of title page and verso of Lackington's *Memoirs* showing portrait.

the eighteenth century. The *Memoirs* is a complicated book, which evolved through many editions over five years, and it is worth tracing in some detail the changes Lackington made in each edition. On 13 October 1791 advertisements began to appear for 'Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of J. Lackington, Bookseller. Written by Himself.'⁴¹ This octavo volume was published in boards, priced at 5s and included a stipple engraving of the author by Edmund Scott taken from a portrait by John Keenan (see Figure 4). The volume was printed for the author and sold by the author at 46–47 Chiswell Street, by W. Bulgin in Bristol and by other booksellers.⁴²

The *Memoirs* seems to have been generally well received. The *English Review* commended Lackington for his 'entertaining' and 'useful' work. The review, like many of the time, contains extracts from the book summarising the contents. It concludes by observing that whilst the author is neither a Montaigne nor a Rousseau, 'yet he contrives to speak of himself with a sort of good-humoured, open vanity, which does not disgust'.⁴³ By contrast, *The Monthly Review* accused Lackington of vanity and shrewdly pointed out that he lost no opportunity to promote his shop in his account, but the review is generally good humoured and favourable.⁴⁴ *The Critical Review*, too, charges Lackington with vanity and recognises the commercial interest in the book, observing that it strikes

⁴¹ See *St James Chronicle or British Evening Post*, 13 October, 1791, *World*, 14 October 1791, *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 18 October 1791 etc. in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* <http://find.galegroup.com> [accessed 19 September 2008]

⁴² On William Bulgin, see Ian Maxted, *Exeter Working Papers in British Book Trade History*, <http://bookhistory.blogspot.co.uk> [accessed 15 May 2012]

⁴³ 'ART. XVI, *English Review, or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature* 17 (1791), 375–81 (pp. 375, 381).

⁴⁴ 'ART. XII, Memoirs of the first Forty-five Years of the Life of James Lackington, the present Bookseller in Chiswell-street, Moorfields, London', *The Monthly Review* (1792), 207–210.

as a kind of 'puffing shop-bill' but this is alleviated by the 'instruction' offered and 'a portion of amusement'.⁴⁵

Encouraged no doubt by its favourable reception, Lackington published a new edition of his *Memoirs* in 1792 containing an additional preface. In this he notes the rapid sale of the first edition and comments that 'on looking into the English Review, I found that the editors had filled seven pages in reviewing those Memoirs, and had bestowed much praise on the author' (*M.*, 1792, p. xl).

Bolstered by approval, he apparently set out to correct typographical errors and found that he had 'omitted to introduce many things which would have been an improvement to the work', something he was quick to rectify (*M.*, 1792, p. lxiv). The resulting edition is more than one hundred pages longer, announcing itself on the title page as having been: – 'Corrected, and much enlarged; interspersed with many *original humorous* Stories and *droll* Anecdotes'. Lackington seems to have added stories which he felt would satisfy an apparent public taste for tales exposing hypocrisy and absurdity amongst the Methodists. He writes with more confidence and even risks giving voice to political opinion by applauding the efforts of the French in throwing off the shackles of tyranny. There are more, and more varied, extracts of poetry added too.

Perhaps the most interesting changes made to his *Memoirs* can be found in the 1793 edition, re-titled *Memoirs of the Forty-Five First Years of the Life of James Lackington*. Lackington continued to add anecdotes and again increased the number and variety of works from which he quotes. Probably in response to the Terror and the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, which shocked many in England, he removed all trace of his admiration for the noble emancipation of the

⁴⁵ 'Memoirs of the first forty-five Years of the Life of James Lackington, the present Bookseller in Chiswell Street, Moorfields, London', *The Critical Review or Annals of Literature*, 4 (1792) 196–203 (p. 196).

French people. He appears to have worked to encourage new readers in this edition and to sell more books. He expands the list of novelists he recommends, and discusses women writers and readers briefly whilst exhorting women to read (*M.*, pp. 402, 423–27).

According to the English Short Title Catalogue, in 1794 five editions were despatched from the Temple of the Muses. Two octavo ‘new editions’, dated 1794, contain the same text as the 1793 edition but include an index added by Lackington.⁴⁶ He produced a cheaper duodecimo ‘7th edition’ in the same year, tightly spaced in smaller type. This, a note reassures purchasers, ‘is not abridged in the least degree, but contains all the additions and improvements; in short, every line as much as the large octavo Edition, that sells at 5s 6d in boards’ (*M.*, 1794, seventh edition, title page). In fact, however, Lackington added to this duodecimo edition more than one hundred further quotations and some observations about writers. This expanded text formed the basis of an ‘eighth’ edition (1794), a ninth edition (1794), a tenth edition (1795), and a ‘new edition’ dated 1795. The ESTC records a further ‘seventh edition’ dated 1794 which contains a note on page 237, ‘Mrs Lackington: she died Jan 27, 1795’. The numbering of these editions is erratic and has led Richard G. Landon to conclude that there is ‘no sign of fourth, fifth or sixth editions, and perhaps they were merely skipped in accordance with one of the time-honoured promotional devices of eighteenth-century publishing’, although why Lackington should need to ‘puff’ a publication which had already gone through three editions rapidly remains a puzzle.⁴⁷ Landon also concludes that some of the ‘new editions’ were in fact ‘straight reprints’ and, as described above, two octavo editions dated 1794

⁴⁶ It is to this edition that page numbers refer throughout this thesis unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁷ Richard G. Landon, ‘Small Profits Do Great Things: James Lackington and Eighteenth-Century Bookselling’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 5 (1976), 387–399 (pp. 388–9).

reproduce the text of the 1793 editions and could be seen to represent 'fourth' and 'fifth' editions in much the same way as the 'eighth', 'ninth' and 'tenth' editions reproduce the text of the seventh edition.⁴⁸ It should be remembered that Lackington was accustomed to publishing a new catalogue twice yearly and it may be that his habit of revising his sales material influenced the constant updating of his autobiography which was, in part, an extension of his promotional strategy.

The death of Dorcas, a new marriage to Mary in 1795, and retirement seem to have halted Lackington's urge to continue to re-work his *Memoirs*.⁴⁹ In 1803, he began a new volume of autobiography to revoke his earlier account and to re-write his life as *The Confessions of J. Lackington*. This was published in duodecimo in 1804.⁵⁰ A copy, also dated 1804, bearing the words 'second edition' on the title page is in the British Library.⁵¹ This is priced at 'Half a Crown' rather than the 'Two Shillings' advertised on the first edition. The text of the two editions is identical apart from the changes in the title pages. The signatures and catchwords are the same, as is the list of errata on the final page.

The work re-tells the story of Lackington's relationship with learning from a conservative perspective. As a preacher, rather than a bookseller, he urges readers to pursue spiritual rather than purely intellectual enlightenment. Included in the slim volume are two letters, 'On the Bad Consequences of Having Daughters Educated at Boarding-Schools' (C, pp. 197–212). These display the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 388.

⁴⁹ Lackington and Allen republished the book again, apparently without his permission in 1803.

⁵⁰ A copy of the first edition, held in the British Library, contains a typographical error in the quotation of a poem by Sir John Davies, on the title page. This copy contains the line 'Batts they became, who Eagles were before'. This was evidently noted whilst the work was in press, because other copies, including one in my possession, have been corrected to read 'Bats they became', see title page, *The Confessions of J. Lackington* (1804), British Library, 10825 b.32.

⁵¹ British Library, 1578 8097.

characteristics of Lackington's other works such as the epistolary form, and numerous quotations. The letters are consistent with the tone of *The Confessions* in warning against an uncritical approach to education. They mark a radical departure from Lackington's endorsement of female learning in *Memoirs*.

The Confessions was less well received than *Memoirs*.⁵² *The Annual Review and History of Literature* used most of the half page it devoted to reviewing the book to remind readers of Lackington's earlier work and concludes by quipping that the author's conversion may have resulted from 'a crack in the head'.⁵³ *The Monthly Review* criticises Lackington for the severe portraits he paints of former friends and treats his return to Methodism with mild scepticism.⁵⁴

Lackington's inclusion of an index in later editions of *Memoirs* and in *The Confessions* is a curious bibliographic feature of both books. Relatively few eighteenth-century 'Lives' contained an index, particularly those of ordinary subjects. An index is both a means of categorising knowledge and drawing attention to specific references. In this respect an index is not so very different from the booksellers' catalogues which Lackington compiled as a shopkeeper to promote his wares. He was adept at drawing buyers' attention to specific items and he employs the same skill in promoting certain incidents whilst organising his own writing. The indices to *Memoirs* and *The Confessions* could be seen as yet another instance of Lackington's 'vanity'. They assume a body of knowledge worthy of investigation and a readership sufficiently curious to seek to study the autobiography in close detail.

⁵² See reviews in *The Annual Review* 3 (1804) and *The Monthly Review* 45 (1804) and *The Gentleman's Magazine* 74 (1804).

⁵³ 'ART XVI. The Confessions of J. Lackington', *Annual Review and History of Literature*, 3 (1804), p. 526.

⁵⁴ 'Art. 37. The Confessions of J. Lackington', *Monthly Review*, 45 (1804), p. 219.

Lackington's reach as a writer extended beyond the shores of Great Britain.

In 1795 his *Memoirs* were translated into German and published as *Aus den anekdoten des noch jest lebenden Buchhändlers James Lackington* by J. B.

Herold in Hamburg. In 1796 *Memoirs of James Lackington who from the humble station of a Journeyman Shoemaker, by great industry, amassed a large fortune, and now lives in a splendid stile, in London* was published in New York by D.

Denniston for J. Fellows. This version was abridged and advertises itself on the title page with the following notice:

Containing: Among other curious and facetious Anecdotes a succinct account of the Watch nights, Classes, Bands, Love-feasts, &c of the Methodists; with specimens of Mr Wesley's and Mr Whitfield's mode of preaching, and the means made use of by them in propagating their tenets.

The Confessions was also published in America. In 1806 Ezekiel Cooper and John Wilson produced it for the Methodist Connection in the United States. Two years later, it was published by John Wilson and Daniel Hitt, again for the Methodist Connection. Both were abridged and like the American edition of *Memoirs*, removed a large number of quotations.

In 1827 Lackington's life was included as volume XVIII in a series, *Autobiography: A Collection of the Most Instructive and Amusing Lives Ever Published Written by the Parties Themselves With Brief Introductions and Compendious Sequels Carrying on the Narrative to the Death of Each Writer*. It was published by Hunt and Clarke and reprinted in 1830 by Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot. Other subjects include Colly Cibber; George Whitfield; Lord Herbert of Cherbury; Cibber's daughter, the actress Charlotte Clarke; and Edward Gibbon. This volume prompted readers to revisit Lackington's story and occasioned new reviews such as that in *The Examiner* on 23 December 1827

bemoaning the resurrection of Lackington's Methodist jibes.⁵⁵ The publishers used the text of the 1793 edition of *Memoirs*. They affixed an abridgement of *The Confessions* as a 'sequel' to bring the earlier account up to date.

⁵⁵ 'Newspaper Chat', in *The Examiner*, 23 December 1827.

Chapter Two

EARLY READING

This chapter investigates Lackington's earliest encounters with books, from his time at school to his first weeks as a bookseller setting up shop in London with a bagful of religious texts. The only source we have for this period is the *Memoirs*, written long after the events described and partly driven by a commercial agenda. Lackington was no longer a Methodist when he wrote this account of his life and he is dismissive of much of his early reading, often summarising the types of books he read with broad generalisations. However, this early period of his life, dominated by practical manuals and religious texts, appears to have established the foundations for life-long patterns of reading and it shaped his relationship with the printed word. This chapter argues that Lackington learnt about the value of personal testimony and the longevity of printed witness from his Methodist reading. He was influenced by the reading programmes and the extraordinary publishing endeavours of John Wesley. He also absorbed invaluable lessons in proselytising from seventeenth-century Dissenting writers which he used to promote his business. His own writing was strongly influenced by this period of early reading.

Early Encounters with Books

Lackington gives no indication in his *Memoirs* as to whether his family owned any books or whether his parents could read. Given the poverty he describes, it is likely that he grew up in a home without books. He was typical of many poor

children in the eighteenth century in receiving an education only for as long as he could be spared from work. In his case, this was no more than two or three years since his mother could no longer afford the two-pence a week it cost and he was required instead to help to supervise his younger siblings (*M.*, pp. 45–46). His time at school appears to have been spent memorising passages from the Bible, for he writes of ‘how proud I used to be to see several ancient dames lift up their heads and eyes with astonishment, while I repeated by memory several chapters out of the New Testament’ (*M.*, p. 45). We do not know precisely how knowledge of the New Testament was transmitted, or by whom, but it appears that the class repeated passages read or recited to them by a teacher. This basic early learning seems to have helped Lackington to develop the skill of oral memorisation – a skill he retained in later life, as is evident from his recall of at least some of the phrases and lines of poetry he inserted into his *Memoirs*. He left school unable to read but with his memory stimulated and familiar with at least some of the New Testament.

When he was about ten years old, Lackington was put to work ‘crying pies’, that is, selling pies and puddings on the streets of Wellington for a local baker (*M.*, pp. 47–48). This, he tells us, he performed with considerable success and he branched out into seasonal work, selling almanacs on market days around Christmas. This first venture into bookselling was also, apparently, highly successful:

In this employ I took great delight, the country people being highly pleased with me, and purchasing a great number of my Almanacks, which excited envy in the itinerant venders of Moore, Wing, Poor Robin &c. (*M.*, p. 70)

Almanacs were sold in bookshops and by itinerant traders in the months before the new year, amidst great competition. These printed books or sheets

came in a range of forms and although they were produced under the control of the Stationers' Company, pirated and unauthorised versions abounded.¹ They were cheap, useful and highly popular. Almanacs provided data on fairs, markets, tides, Saints days, and weights and measures. Some used calendars to predict auspicious times for planting, ploughing, gelding animals, etc. based on astrological portents.² Popular editions, such as 'Wing' and 'Moore', mentioned by Lackington, also contained social comment and cheap sensationalism, and Bernard Capp argues that the blend of instruction and amusement they provided filled the gap left by a movement away from astrology in a rational age.³ Lackington's early encounter with this most ubiquitous form of print not only honed his commercial skills but may also have taught him the value of the utilitarian, functional books on which he would build his business. His *Memoirs* may be filled with poetry, but he built his business on selling hymn books, trade manuals and other literary tools as we shall see in Chapter 6.⁴

The most formative years of Lackington's youth were spent in Taunton with the Bowden family – George and Mary and their two sons George and John – to whom he was apprenticed as a shoemaker at the age of fourteen and a half. Lackington describes the family as attending regular 'anabaptist' meetings to which their apprentice accompanied them but found little to interest him (*M.*, pp. 72–73). 'Anabaptist' was often a term of abuse – one indeed used by John Wesley when describing Baptists.⁵ It refers to a radical, continental heresy alive

¹ See St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 58.

² Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500–1800* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 63. According to Capp, 'Wing' was founded by Vincent Wing in 1641 (p. 242), Francis Moore's or 'Old Moore's' *Vox Stellarum* was first published in 1699 (p. 43), and William Winstanley first produced *Poor Robin's Almanac* in 1662 (pp. 39–40).

³ Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, p. 245.

⁴ See Raven, 'Selling One's Life', p. 16.

⁵ See Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), I, p. 441.

in England during the sixteenth century which, amongst other beliefs, questioned whether Christ took on human flesh at his birth. Michael Watts observes that General Baptists, rather than the more Calvinist Particular Baptists, tended to be associated with Anabaptists so it may be that Lackington used this term to indicate that the Bowdens were General Baptists. Evidence in the *Memoirs* indicates that the family was of an Arminian, rather than a Calvinist, persuasion.⁶

As General Baptists the Bowdens believed that baptism should be undertaken only by believers old enough to understand the significance of their actions.⁷ Their son, George, was baptised when he was seventeen year old. Soon after this significant religious rite, however, George 'happened to hear a sermon by one of Mr. Wesley's preachers' and was convinced of the need to convert to Methodism and to persuade his family to do the same (*M.*, p. 78). This led to heated discussions amongst the Bowdens. George appears to have favoured the more Calvinist message preached by George Whitefield, rather than the Arminian beliefs of Wesley. This set him in opposition to his pious mother and he began to argue with her, insisting that 'good works' were of no avail for salvation, and that it was '*faith* alone that did every thing, without a grain of morality' (*M.*, pp. 79–80). Since Mary had 'no great talents for controversy' and her son 'had a very tenacious memory, and employed all his thoughts on these subjects', it was not long before both John Bowden and young Lackington were won over by his reasoning (*M.*, p. 82). Thus began Lackington's enduring, sometimes turbulent, relationship with Methodism.

⁶ Although General Baptists were geographically strongest in the South East of England like the earlier Anabaptists, they had links with the cloth trade, an important part of the economy of the West Country. See Watts, *The Dissenters*, pp. 13–14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Just as his religious sensibilities were awakened by the wrangling in the Bowden household, so Lackington's curiosity was piqued:

These extraordinary accounts and discourses, together with the controversies between the mother and the sons, made me think they knew many matters of which I was totally ignorant. This created in me a desire for knowledge, that I might know who was right and who was wrong. But to my great mortification, I could not read. (*M.*, p. 83–84)

His desire for knowledge and need to gain access to possible sources of that knowledge drove him to seek reading lessons from John Bowden, exchanging the three-halfpence per week allowance provided by Mrs Lackington for one hour's lesson in spelling in the dark at bedtime. Lackington's intellectual curiosity seems to have propelled him in life and it was fed by his reading. His early attempts at reading, meanwhile, were supported by the strong literary bent inculcated by Methodism. The Bowden boys' double legacy seems to have been fundamental to Lackington's later success as a bookseller and writer.

Having learnt to read, young Lackington needed material to practice his new skill. It is characteristic of this shrewd bookseller that when describing the Bowdens later in his life, he judged them by the books they owned, presenting a portrait of a God-fearing and hard-working if apparently rather pedestrian family:

My master's whole library consisted of a school-size Bible, Watts's Psalms and Hymns, Foot's Tract on Baptism, Culpepper's Herbal, the History of the Gentle Craft, an old imperfect volume of Receipts in Physic, Surgery, &c. and the Ready Reckoner. The ideas of the family were as circumscribed as their library. (*M.*, p. 76)

That the Bowdens had a library at all, albeit one described as 'circumscribed', is worthy of comment. Even in 1792 when Lackington insured his own library for £200, most of those insuring their homes and contents did not specifically insure against loss of 'Printed Books' and when they did, most valued their libraries at between £5 and £20, a figure considerably lower than the value of their 'Wearable

Apparel'.⁸ This suggests that these households either did not own many printed books or did not place sufficient value upon them to insure against their loss. It is difficult to estimate the value of the Bowden's books but most could have been bought for between 6d and 2s, although the Bible, if it was bought new, represented a significant investment for this artisan family: a new folio Family Bible with notes and explanations, cost 1l 16s; a 'neat' octavo Bible cost 15s; whilst even a small duodecimo Bible cost 4s.⁹

Limited though the Bowden library might be, it was designed to assist the daily religious, domestic, and commercial needs of the family. Isaac Watts's hugely popular *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), the school-sized Bible, and William Foot's *A Practical Discourse Concerning Baptism* (1739) provided the basis for the family's religious devotions. Foot was, like the Bowdens, a General Baptist. He had been a pastor in the West Country early in the eighteenth century.¹⁰ His tract on Baptism, which probably cost as little as 6d, laid out the Biblical precedent set by Christ for adult, rather than infant, Baptism by total immersion. It was a document aimed specifically at Baptists.

The Bowdens' domestic needs were served by a range of practical books. Nicholas Culpeper's *The English Physician or an Astrologo-Physical Discourse of the Vulgar Herbs of this Nation* (1652) was published widely from the mid-

⁸ Records for 1792, Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Group, London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/386, record 597391. A rough average value of 'Wearable Apparel' at this time is £50.

⁹ 'Foot on Baptism' was priced at 6d in *W. Ash's Divinity Catalogue for 1788* (London: Ash, 1788), p. 23; 'Watts's Hymns' at 1s in Benjamin White, *Catalogue of a Valuable Collection of Books* (London: White, 1766), p. 129; 'Ready Reckoner' at 1s 6d, 'Culpeper's Sure Guide to Physic and Surgery', 1s, 6d, in *T. Lowndes Catalogue for 1778* (London: Lowndes, 1778), pp. 86, 15; 'History of the Gentle Craft' at 6d in *A Catalogue of Several Libraries and Parcels of Books* (London: Homan Turpin, 1769), p. 79; and 'Culpeper's Herbal' at 2s in *A Catalogue of Books* (London: T. Scollick, 1788), p. 105. For the price of Bibles, see Edward Ballad's *Divinity Catalogue* (London: Ballad, 1764), pp. 5, 35.

¹⁰ See Jerom Much, *A History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England* (London: R. Hunter, 1835), p. 475.

seventeenth century and offered instruction on curing common complaints using native plants.¹¹ This, together with 'Receipts in Physic, Surgery, &c', could be consulted on medical matters. Daniel Fenning's *The Ready Reckoner or Trader's Most Useful Assistant in Buying and Selling All Sorts of Commodities either Wholesale or Retail* (1757) provided tables showing the relative cost of different weights of goods which could assist both merchants and shoppers.

The greater part of the Bowdens' small library thus consisted of useful books of reference. The only exception mentioned by Lackington is Thomas Deloney's *The Pleasant and Princely History of the Gentle Craft* (c. 1597) which celebrates the lives of a selection of exceptional shoemakers including the patron saint of cobblers, Saint Crispin, and one-time shoemaker and Lord Mayor of London, Simon Eyre. These old-fashioned tales born of romance brought gentle status to the craft of cobbling. They appealed to the aspirations and pride of shoemakers and cemented associations within the wider trade by including songs to be sung on St Crispin's Day. Deloney's tales enjoyed wide popular appeal and were often published as chapbooks to be sold by itinerant pedlars countrywide.¹²

Of all the books mentioned, the Bible was the most important to the Bowdens and to Lackington:

On Sundays all went to meeting; my master on that day said a short grace before dinner, and the boys read a few chapters in the Bible, took a walk for an hour or two, then read a chapter or two more. (*M.*, p. 76)

Mary Bowden, too, 'would sit down for hours together, with her Bible in her lap, from which she would read such scriptures as proved the necessity of living a

¹¹ Lackington and Denis published an edition of Culpeper's book in 1778.

¹² 'Gentle Craft; or, History of Crispin and Crispianus' is listed in Bew's 'A Catalogue of Chapman's Books' in *The Traveller's and Chapman's Daily Instructor* (London: Sawbridge, 1705). It is also listed amongst Samuel Pepys's 'Small Merry Books', see Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 265.

good life, performing good works, &c' (*M.*, p. 81).

Lackington, meanwhile, eager to practise his reading and filled with the fervour of a new convert, read ten chapters of the Bible every day outside working hours by whatever light he could find, even the light of the moon (*M.*, p. 100). The reference to 'ten chapters' a day suggests that he read sequentially, starting at Genesis and reading through to Revelations. W.R. Owens argues that 'repeated, sequential reading of the Bible was a practice frequently and strongly recommended by Protestant writers, and was [. . .] one of the main ways in which people read the Bible in early modern England.'¹³

When he joined the Bowden family's Sunday Bible reading sessions, however, Lackington seems to have deliberately read selectively with the intention of provoking his mistress:

Whenever I was ordered in my turn to read in the Bible, I always selected such chapters as I thought militated against Arians, Socinians, &c. and such verses as I deemed favourable to the doctrine of Original Sin, Justification by Faith, imputed Righteousness, the doctrine of the Trinity, &c. On such parts I always placed a particular emphasis, which puzzled and teased the old lady a good deal. (*M.*, pp. 101–102)

He recalls selecting passages in 'St Paul's Epistles' advocating the doctrine of justification by faith alone which Mrs Bowden countered with passages from the 'Epistle of St James', presumably such verses as Chapter 2. 24: 'Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only'. (*M.*, p. 102) This use of the Bible in theological disputation shows that Lackington had not simply learnt to read but was reading with a purpose and reading in order to persuade others.

¹³ W. R. Owens, 'Modes of Bible Reading in Early Modern England', in *The History of Reading: International Perspectives c. 1500–1990*, ed. by Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 32–45 (p. 34).

Methodist Books

As well as reading the Bible daily, Lackington seems to have acquired books through the Methodist network he had joined. He read 'Mr. Wesley's Hymns', 'Mr. Wesley's Tracts, Sermons, &c' (*M.*, pp. 99–100). He writes that there were 'thousands in this [Methodist] society who will never read any thing besides the Bible, and books published by Mr. Wesley', adding that he read little else for several years (*M.*, p. 125). Lackington is now dismissive of these readers but as a youth he appears to have benefitted from Wesley's extraordinary efforts to keep his followers supplied with cheap devotional literature. He provides little information about this material but we may surmise that he read some at least of the many 'lives' of the faithful published by Wesley, the 50-volume Christian Library, and the many tracts and sermons. It is worth considering briefly the ways in which Wesley used reading to stimulate faith, the measures he took to supply his followers with devotional literature and the lessons Lackington might have taken from his example.

Vicki Tolar Burton in her study of Wesley's 'spiritual literacy' draws attention to his literate, Dissenting genealogy. His father, Samuel, had been educated at Newington Green Dissenting Academy. He was a writer, a poet, and a partner of John Dunton in producing the *Athenian Mercury*, a twice-weekly journal. His mother, Susannah, was the daughter of the Presbyterian preacher Samuel Annesley and the custodian of his papers. She taught her children to read when they were five years old and remained a powerful presence in Wesley's life.¹⁴ This early bookish upbringing proved to be highly influential. David Hempton observes that one of the most striking features of Methodism was the

¹⁴ Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy*, pp. 33–66.

control exerted over the movement by Wesley through 'selecting, editing, publishing and disseminating print'. Hempton comments that he 'literally tried to supervise the entire spiritual literacy of his connection by establishing a sort of Wesleyan canon beyond which his followers were encouraged not to go'.¹⁵

For Wesley, reading and writing were central to spiritual development. His book, *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood and Newcastle upon Tyne* (1743), set out a pattern of living for followers. It discouraged the reading of any book or singing of any song 'which does not tend to the knowledge and love of God'. Methodists were expected to spend time each day 'searching the Scriptures', a phrase which is explained in a publication of 1798 as 'reading some part of them every day carefully, seriously, and with earnest prayer for a blessing from God; and doing this fruitfully, immediately practising what they learn'.¹⁶ Readers were required to engage their intellects and emotions in their study and we should assume from the energy which Lackington applied to reading that he was influenced by Wesley's methods.

In *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* (1749) Wesley set out a stringent regime of reading, prayer and study for those seeking to become assistants in the organisation. This involved rising at 4am to begin work.¹⁷

Preachers were also expected to be well-educated in order to meet the spiritual

¹⁵ Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 52, 58–9.

¹⁶ John Wesley, *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood and Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle upon Tyne: John Gooding, 1743), p. 8, and John Wesley, *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the Methodist Societies established by the Rev John Wesley* (London: George Whitefield, 1798), p. 8. The Methodist preacher, George Whitefield, died in 1770. This edition of Wesley's *The Nature, Design and General Rules* may have been re-printed to remind Methodists of founding principles after the Methodist church split from the Church of England in 1795, and after Alexander Kilham broke away to form the New Connexion in 1797.

¹⁷ See John Wesley, *A Plain Account of The People Called Methodists* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1749), pp. 23–24.

needs of their flocks. They were required to read for six to eight hours a day, studying not just the Scriptures but also Greek and Hebrew texts, early Church fathers, secular history, science, logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, mathematics, human nature and manners.¹⁸ Wesley hoped that his methodical approach to learning would ensure some consistency in the quality of those spreading God's word.

Wesley further bound his organisation together by selecting, abridging, publishing and distributing suitable works. Isabel Rivers notes that this extraordinary exercise in print production, which resulted in 'over four hundred cheap books, almost all of them duodecimo pamphlets' began at Oxford in 1733.¹⁹ The hub of activity subsequently moved to the Book Room at the Foundry in London where book stewards helped to distribute texts and keep accounts.²⁰ Hempton emphasises the vast scale of this endeavour: how Wesley commissioned and published biographies and autobiographies as exemplary lives for the edification of his followers; selected books to comprise a 'Christian Library' for use by preachers; edited and organised hymn books to be used in meetings; published tracts, including many intended for free distribution to the poor; and distributed the *Arminian Magazine*.²¹ Significantly, preachers were not allowed to publish works independently of his control. As Rivers and Tolar Burton observe, Wesley 'extracted' ruthlessly, abridging the writing of others where he considered it necessary to fit within the bounds of his beliefs. He cut William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* drastically, 'eliminating what seemed repetitive and redundant . . . and what he found doctrinally

¹⁸ Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy*, p. 110.

¹⁹ Isabel Rivers, 'William Law and Religious Revival: The Reception of *A Serious Call*', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71 (2008), 633–49 (p. 641).

²⁰ Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy*, p. 235.

²¹ David Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 58–9.

suspect'.²² It is not surprising in this context, that Wesley predicted that he 'could never keep a bookseller six months in his flock' (*M.*, p. 265). This group had easier access to a broader range of titles than other Methodists and could stray beyond the boundaries of suitable printed matter controlled by the organisation.

The inventory of books from his publishing venture, left at the time of Wesley's death includes pious 'Lives', sermons, journals, books of advice, text books, tracts, and Hymn books. One of the few works of literature on the list is Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, of which sixty-six copies remained. As we shall see, this work held a place of almost totemic importance in Lackington's life and it is possible that he first encountered it as a Methodist publication.²³ In an organisation controlled, motivated and organised through a sophisticated system of publishing and distribution, aimed at delivering print to the poorest members, it is probable that he had access to many of these texts. This period of Lackington's reading life was to have enormous influence on his future career and writing and it seems highly probable that aspects of Wesley's methodical approach to promoting and distributing texts inspired Lackington in later life.

A Very Good Library

Sometime after 1767 Lackington moved to Bristol, at that time a large city with a population of over 20,000 which was second only to London 'in wealth, trade and population'.²⁴ Transport links to London were good and as one of the country's most important ports, Bristol enjoyed well-maintained international as well as

²² Rivers, 'William Law and Religious Revival', p. 643.

²³ Tolar Burton, 'Appendix B', in *Spiritual Literacy*, pp. 315–39.

²⁴ John Aiken, *England Delineated* (London: T. Bensley for J. Johnson, 1788), pp. 320–21.

national communications.²⁵ It had a flourishing publishing industry supporting two local newspapers. William Bonny had set up *The Bristol Post Boy* in 1702, and William Pine owned and published *The Bristol Gazette*.²⁶ Felix Farley, who had first printed Wesley's defining sermon, *Free Grace* (1739) and Pine were responsible for printing many of Wesley's books.²⁷ Lackington had moved to a bustling city which supported an active printing industry and a tradition of Methodist publishing. We know that he engaged in this local print trade because he writes of selling some of his own songs to the Bristol printers for a guinea and describes the pride with which he heard them sung on the streets of the city by ballad singers (*M.*, p. 151).

It was whilst living in Bristol with fellow shoemaker John Jones and his siblings that Lackington began to build up his own book collection. He had until that time only read a few 'enthusiastic' religious authors but he now 'strongly recommended' to Jones the purchasing of other books (*M.*, p. 151). The two young men were very conscious of their lack of literary knowledge:

So ignorant were we on the subject, that neither of us knew what books were fit for our perusal, nor what to enquire for, as we had scarce ever heard or seen even any *title pages*, except a few of the religious sort, which at that time we had no relish for. So that we were at a loss how to increase our small stock of science. (*M.*, pp. 151–52)

Lackington's candour is touching and exposes the problem facing many new readers of how to access the types of books they required. We might compare the two men's bafflement with an account Colclough gives of law student, Dudley Ryder standing reading in a book shop in Westminster Hall. As Colclough points

²⁵ An advertisement for the Bristol to London Diligence suggests that passengers and goods could be transported within a day between the cities, see the 'Bristol Gazette and Public Advertiser' for 17 July 1777.

²⁶ John Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1 and 100.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

out, Ryder would probably have had to request his book by title in order to read it. This son of a linen draper and a frequenter of coffee houses, was a more informed and therefore, confident, purchaser than Lackington and Jones.²⁸ To some extent publishers anticipated their dilemma by printing extensive title pages providing considerably more information than we expect today. Some booksellers used these to advertise their wares, displaying them prominently by pinning them to the doorposts of their shops.²⁹ Indeed an experienced reader could determine much about a book by studying the title page and preface. Isaac Watts draws attention to the shallow learning of some of those in the habit of scanning these pages when he describes a reader he names 'Subito', who 'suddenly' gives an impression of having read widely, recommending volumes to others, when in fact he had only read the title page.³⁰

Jones and Lackington were ashamed to admit their ignorance in bookshops but found the informality of a book stall at the annual fair in St James's churchyard more conducive to making their first purchase (*M.*, pp. 152–53). This is a reminder of just how important less formal print distribution networks still were in the eighteenth century. David Stoker describes the mixture of different outlets for print in his study of the East Anglian book trade, observing a transition in the eighteenth century as the number of bookshops increased and fairs declined in importance as retail centres.³¹ Fairs, James Raven writes, had played an important part in extending the reach of the London and provincial booksellers,

²⁸ Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p. 70.

²⁹ See Giles Mandelbrote, 'Workplaces and Living Spaces: London book trade inventories of the late seventeenth century' in *The London Book Trade: Topographies of Print in the Metropolis from the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2003), pp. 21–43 (p. 32).

³⁰ Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind* (London: James Brackstone, 1741), p. 16.

³¹ See David Stoker, 'To all Booksellers, Country Chapmen, Hawkers and Others: how the population of East Anglia obtained its printed material', in *Fairs, Markets and the Itinerant Book Trade*, ed. by Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2007), pp. 107–136 (p. 123).

and Spufford, too, draws attention to the importance in the seventeenth century of the carrier's cart, the pack horse and pedlar in delivering printed goods throughout the country.³² Lackington's account highlights how valuable poorer readers found the less formal environment of the fair, the market stall or a transaction with a pedlar. In such settings, gossip and news were exchanged and entertainment provided, there was an air of festivity, and sometimes the disreputable allure of sexual licence. One contemporary observed in the 1770s that Bury Fair had become 'rather a Place of Amusement than a temporary Mart, as most of the Merchandises now brought thither are chiefly Articles of Luxury and Curiosity'.³³ In short, for the two journeymen shoemakers, browsing at a stall and book-buying, was a leisure activity which would have offered attractions beyond those met in the more formal setting of a bookshop.

Lackington bought 'Hobbes's Translation of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey' because he 'had somehow or other heard that Homer was a great poet'. He also bought 'Walker's poetical paraphrase of Epictetus's morals' and he and Jones were 'well pleased with our bargains' (*M.*, p. 153). When they got home they found the Homer difficult to read 'owing to the obscurity of the translation', which once again draws attention to the difficulties for new readers in selecting suitable reading matter (*M.*, p. 154). Fortunately, Walker was 'very easy to be read, and as easily understood', and Lackington 'made the book my companion wherever I went, and read it over and over in raptures' (*M.*, p. 154).

Lackington probably bought one of the two editions of *The Iliads and Odysees of Homer Translated out of Greek into English by Tho. Hobbes of*

³² See Raven, *The Business of Books*, p. 60; and Spufford, 'The Pedlar, the Historian and the Folklorist: Seventeenth Century Communications' *Folklorist* 105 (1994), 13–24 (p. 16).

³³ Charles Caraccioli, *An Historical Account of Sturbridge, Bury, and the Most Famous Fairs in Europe and America* (1773?) quoted in Stoker, 'The Book Trade in East Anglia', p. 123.

Malmesbury, printed in 1677 and 1686. Ellis Walker produced his translation of Epictetus, *Epicteti Enchiridion made English in a Poetical Paraphrase*, at the end of the seventeenth century with twelve editions published in London and Dublin between 1692 and 1724 and three further editions of *The Morals of Epictetus* published before 1778. In retrospect, Lackington regretted not buying Pope's eighteenth-century translations of Homer but it may be that these newer editions were not available from the stalls he visited.³⁴

Lackington describes how he and Jones worked hard 'in order to get money to purchase books; and for some months every shilling we could spare was laid out at old book-shops, stalls, &c.' (*M.*, p. 163). He makes it clear that the pair bought books from low-priced sellers such as second-hand shops and open-air stalls. St Clair delineates the different strata of book sales during the Romantic period which enabled the bookseller-publishers to reap the most from their investments. Monopoly owners would ensure that the volumes they produced were initially priced high in order to bring in the maximum return from wealthy consumers, but they would then market their products for the next tranche of less affluent buyers and would move down the 'demand curve' in stages as appropriate. Cheaper books might be issued in smaller formats, or even in abridged editions. Older books which found their way into the second-hand market were usually cheaper than new books and certain popular titles seem to be more prevalent at the very lowest reaches of the demand curve. St Clair describes the effect of this process on the 'reading public':

The layering of readership by time that these structures encouraged not only meant that different socio-economic groups read different texts at intervals of different lengths from the time they were first written, edited, or compiled, but it created a self-reinforcing pattern in

³⁴ Pope's translation of *The Iliad* was first published in 1715 and his translation of *The Odyssey* (with the assistance of Elijah Fenton and William Broome) in 1725–6.

which the readerly horizons of expectations also diverged, the economically less-well-off being, on the whole, held back in various stages of obsolescence in their horizons of expectations as well as in the texts they read.³⁵

The 'very good library' which Lackington eventually accumulated bears out St Clair's analysis. He writes that:

This choice collection consisted of Polhil on precious Faith; Polhil on the Decrees; Shepherd's sound Believer; Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress; Bunyan's Good News for the vilest of Sinners; his Heavenly Footman; his Grace abounding to the chief of Sinners; his Life and Death of Mr Badman; his Holy War in the town of *Mansoul*; Hervey's Meditations; Hervey's Dialogues; Roger's Seven Helps to Heaven; Hall's Jacob's Ladder; Divine Breathings of a devout Soul; Adams on the second epistle of Peter; Adams's Sermons on the *black* Devil, the *white* Devil, &c. &c. Collings's Divine Cordial for the Soul; Pearse's Soul's Espousal to Christ; Erskine's Gospel Sonnets; the Death of Abel: The Faith of God's elect; Manton on the epistle of St. James; Pample's Works; Baxter's Shove for a *heavy-arsed* Christian; his Call to the Unconverted; Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears; Mrs. Moore's Evidences for Heaven; Mead's Almost a Christian; The Sure Guide to Heaven; Brooks on Assurance; God's Revenge against Murder; Brooks's Heaven upon Earth; The Pathway to Heaven; Wilcox's Guide to eternal Glory; Derham's Unsearchable Riches of Christ; his Exposition of Revelations; Alleine's Sure Guide to Heaven; The Sincere Convert; Watson's Heaven taken by Storm; Heaven's Vengeance; Wall's None but Christ; Aristotle's Masterpiece; Coles on God's Sovereignty; Charnock on Providence; Young's Short and sure Guide to Salvation; Wesley's Sermons, Journals, Tracts, &c. and others of the same description.

We had indeed a few of a better sort, as Gay's Fables; Pomfret's Poems; Milton's Paradise Lost; besides Hobbe's [sic] Homer, and Walker's Epictetus. (*M.*, pp. 163–5)

Most of the books in this collection date from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries and many were best-sellers printed in numerous editions. Examples include the works of John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, Arthur Dent's *The Plaine Mans Path Way to Heaven* (1601), Elisha Coles's *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty* (1673), Salomon Gessner's *The Death of Abel* translated from German by Mary Collyer (1761), Ralph Erskine's *Gospel Sonnets* (1726), James Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs* (1746) and *Theron and Aspasio a Series*

³⁵ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 40.

of *Dialogues* (1755), John Gay's *Fables* (1727) and *Aristotle's Master-piece* (1690).³⁶

As befitted the library of practising Methodists, Lackington's and Jones's books are mostly religious texts written by Nonconformist ministers such as Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) and Elisha Coles (c. 1608–1688), Joseph Alleine (1634–1668), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Matthew Mead (1628/9–1699), Edward Pearse (1633–1673), Edward Polhill (1622–1693/4) and Thomas Watson (d.1686). Others were Anglican clergymen with Presbyterian leanings such as James Hervey (1714–1758). Robert Southwell, the author of *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares* (1591), was a Jesuit martyr, but his discourse and meditations went through several editions.³⁷

Lackington displays impressive mental recall when recollecting these works after approximately twenty years. John Feather has cast doubt on the reliability of the list, suggesting that Lackington exaggerated it for literary effect, adding nonetheless that it 'gives a flavour of the tastes of the religious book buyer in the provinces'. He adds that 'the rising comedy, and the juxtaposition of genuine and false titles does not disguise Lackington's point'.³⁸ There are certainly some inaccuracies and some curious titles on the list but most can be traced and it is questionable whether there are, in fact, any false titles. Sometimes Lackington simply lists popular short titles such as 'Manton on the epistle of St James' instead of the longer *A Practical Commentary: or an Exposition with Notes upon the Epistle of James* (1651).

³⁶ See Appendix A for a list of the works included in Lackington and Jones's library.

³⁷ See 'Southwell, Robert' in 'Appendix I Sample of Best-sellers and Steady Sellers First Published in England c. 1536 – 1700' in Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), no page number.

³⁸ Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade*, p. 39.

I have found no copies of 'Baxter's Shove for a *heavy-arsed* Christian', but a Welsh minister, William Bunyan, published *An Effectual Shove to the Heavy-Arse Christian* in 1768. This short work may have been wrongly attributed to Baxter. There is another eighteenth-century reference to 'Richard Baxter's "Hearty Shove for a Heavy Arsed Christian"'. This refers to the title as 'whimsical', suggesting that although 'heavy-arse' was a colloquial term for a sluggish person, it was not an expression expected to be used in the title of a religious tract.³⁹

The most puzzling title included in a list of otherwise religious books is *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, a practical guide to matters sexual and procreative. The long title of a 1690 edition gives a flavour of this book:

Aristotle's master-piece: or The secrets of generation display'd in all the parts thereof, Containing 1. The signs of barrenness. 2. The way of getting a boy or girl. 3. Of the likeness of children to parents. 4. Of the infusion of the soul into the infant. 5. Of monsturous births and the reason thereof. 6. Of the benefits of marriage to both sexes. 7. The prejudice of unequal matches. 8. The discovery of insufficiency. 9. The cause and cure of the green sickness. 10. A discourse of virginity. 11. How a midwife ought to be qualified. 12. Directions and cautions to midwives. 13. Of the organs of generation in women. 14. The fabrick of the womb. 15. The use and actions of the genitals. 16. Signs of conception, and whether of a male or female. 17. To discover false conception. 18. Instructions for women with child. 19. For preventing miscarriage. 20. For women in child-bed . . . to which is added, a word of advice to both sexes in the act of copulation. And the pictures of several monstrous births. Very necessary for all midwives, nurses and young-married women.⁴⁰

As is clear, this work warns against the consequences of illicit sex and includes woodcut illustrations of the 'monstrous births' which result from such unions. It clearly served a functional purpose as a medical guide but Jonathan Rose suggests

³⁹ In 'The Spoon' we learn that Baxter apparently wrote not just 'Hearty Shove for a Heavy Arsed Christian' but also 'Whip for the Arse of the Scarlet Whore of Babylon', *The Attic Miscellany*, 3 vols (London: Bentley & Co, 1790), II, p. 212.

⁴⁰ *Aristotle's Master-piece* (London: How, 1690), title page.

that it was also bought as a sex guide.⁴¹ Indeed M. A. Katritzky writes that ‘the status of *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* . . . was less than reputable’.⁴² The editor of the ‘twenty-eighth’ edition chose to emphasise its possible spiritual value, demanding ‘why should not the mysteries of nature, in the generation of man, be without blame enquired into?’ He was aware, however, that ‘this knowledge is too often abused by vain and light persons’ who ‘make their business to ridicule’ this subject.⁴³ This book was cheap, easily available and just the sort of title that Lackington and Jones might have picked up from a market stall. How they chose to interpret it, we are not told. It seems possible, as Feather suggests, that Lackington included this incongruous title to discredit his ‘very good’ devotional library.

This list of books raises a further question about the types of books Lackington was reading. Many of the religious best-sellers listed were reproduced in chapbook form as ‘small godly books’ or ‘penny godlinesses’.⁴⁴ These cheaply produced books usually consisted of twelve or twenty-four pages made from one or two sheets, folded and unstitched, illustrated with woodcuts. They were produced in minimum print runs of 1,000 or 2,000.⁴⁵ Publishers took advantage of the reputations of popular writers such as Richard Baxter and John Bunyan to sell their books in this format even if the material they offered bore little or no relationship to the original work of the writer on the title page.

⁴¹ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 207.

⁴² M.A. Katritzky, ‘Images of “Monsters” and Performers: J.A. Comenius’s *Orbis pictus* and *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*’, in *Practicing New Editions: Transformation and Transfer of the Early Modern Book, 1450–1800*, ed. by Hiram Kümper and Vladimir Simić (Nordhausen: Bautz-Verlag, 2011), pp. 77–118 (p. 93).

⁴³ *Aristotle’s Complete Masterpiece* (London: for the booksellers, 1764), pp.vi–vii.

⁴⁴ For further information about religious chapbooks see Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, pp. 194–218.

⁴⁵ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 340.

We find an example of this in a short pamphlet entitled *God's Call to Unconverted Sinners*. This appears to be based on Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live* (1658), a book owned by Lackington. Several versions of this pamphlet are extant, each with a remarkably similar text and each with a different attribution on the title page: a fifteen page edition, published in Edinburgh, is 'By R. Baxter'; a 1719 version, of sixteen pages, is 'Written by R. B.'; and another printed and sold by R. Homfray in Sheffield of twenty four pages is credited to 'J. Bunyan Minister of the Gospel' (see Figure 5). These typical 'penny godlinesses' offer readers fewer pages than Baxter allocated to introductory matter in his *A Call to the Unconverted*. The survival of so many different versions of this cheap pamphlet is evidence of the large number produced in the eighteenth century. It helps to explain how titles could come to be attributed wrongly to certain authors, and also raises the question of whether Lackington and Jones read Baxter or chapbook-Baxter.

The Nonconformist Legacy

N. H. Keeble has argued that the prevalence of so many Puritan and Nonconformist texts amongst the list of bestsellers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century should encourage us to reassess the cultural consequences of the Restoration:

By accepting the cultural premises and contemporary evaluation of the victors, we have been misled into identifying the political defeat of Puritanism with its cultural demise. The contrary seems rather to be the case: political defeat was the condition of cultural achievement.⁴⁶

Not only were Dissenting writers 'heirs to a literate, literary and bookish religious tradition', they found themselves forced to rely upon print to overcome the

⁴⁶ N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), p. 22.

Figure 5: An example of title pages taken from two chapbook editions of *God's Call to Unconverted Sinner*, attributed to different writers.

consequences of the punitive legislation that followed the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.⁴⁷ Amid an atmosphere of persecution, the Conventicle Act was passed in 1664 forbidding groups of five or more people from meeting together to worship except in accordance with the liturgy of the Church of England, and a year later The Five Mile Act forbade all clergy who did not subscribe to the tenets of the Anglican Church from preaching within five miles of their former parishes. Whilst many found means of circumventing these conditions, the 'Clarendon Code' effectively gagged Nonconforming ministers.⁴⁸

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, those clergymen unable to preach directly wrote or distributed inexpensive books intended to reach their flocks.⁴⁹ John Bunyan, imprisoned for twelve years, felt compelled to write to those whose spiritual welfare was, he considered, his responsibility. He explained to them that he had been 'taken from you in presence, and so tied up, that I cannot perform that duty that from God doth lie upon me, to youward, for your further edifying and building up in faith and holyness.'⁵⁰ He offered them this account of his own spiritual development and response to persecution in order to sustain their spirits.⁵¹ Thomas Shepard, a Puritan at odds with the teachings of Laudian Anglicanism, set sail for the new world before the Civil War to become a 'preacher of God's Word in New England' and was forced to resort to print in order to communicate with those parishioners he had left behind. He is explicit about his reasons for writing, sending a book as a vicarious 'voice' to stir the hearts and souls of his friends and former countrymen:

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁸ See Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, pp. 221–27.

⁴⁹ Eamon Duffy, 'The Godly and the Multitude in Stuart England', *Seventeenth Century* 1:1 (1986) 31–55 (p.48).

⁵⁰ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. by W. R. Owens (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid.

I have been willing to get the Wind and take Season that I might leave some part of God's precious Truth on Record that it might speak (oh that it might be to the Heart!) among whom I cannot (and when I shall not) be.⁵²

Richard Baxter similarly recognised the power of the printed word, writing that the Press 'hath a louder voice than mine'.⁵³ He duly sent his *A Call to the Unconverted* specifically as the title page declares 'to be read in families where any are unconverted'. Readers are instructed to study religious texts to maintain their own spiritual health and to seek out others and read to them. Baxter asks that:

You will seriously read over this small Treatise (and if you have such that need it in your Families, that you read it over and over to them! And if those that fear God would go now and then to their Ignorant Neighbours, and read this or some other Book to them of this Subject, they might be a means of winning souls. If we cannot intreat so small a labour of Men for their own Salvation as to read such short Instructions as these, they set little by themselves and will most justly Perish. Secondly when you have read over this Book, I would intreat you to go alone and ponder a little what you have read.⁵⁴

Lackington and his companions appear to have responded to such exhortations to read and study. He writes that 'so anxious were we to read a great deal, that we allowed ourselves but about three hours sleep in twenty-four' (*M.*, p. 165). Furthermore, he and Jones took it in turns to read aloud to the others while they worked. We do not know if this was because the Jones siblings were either unable to read or less enthusiastic in their religion, or whether this communal, devotional reading was a way that this small group of friends proclaimed their godly and evangelical identity.⁵⁵ What seems certain is that Lackington not only followed the Nonconformist practice of active reading and discussion with others, but that he absorbed the explicit intention of writers such as Baxter, Shepard and

⁵² Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Believer* (Aberdeen: James Nichol, 1730), dedication.

⁵³ Quoted in Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p. 83.

⁵⁴ Richard Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted* (London: booksellers of London and Westminster, 1704), preface.

⁵⁵ See Cambers, *Godly Reading*, p. 9.

Bunyan to reach beyond the constraints of time, distance and the grave to meet their readers in print. Lackington clearly understood the power of print to reach out and persuade and he used it with great effect.

One further feature of these Dissenting texts seems to have resonated with Lackington. These works are a call to sinners to reform but as Keeble points out they also represent an opportunity to declare their authors' commitment to their beliefs in the face of opposition and indeed to put their case to readers directly.⁵⁶ They support their arguments with meticulous care, quoting from the Bible, citing book, chapter and verse. Matthew Mead's *The Almost Christian Discovered* is dedicated to the 'auditors' of his original sermons. Should those auditors have read the printed version of his sermons, they would have been able to cross reference all his biblical allusions with the help of marginal reference notes laid out next to the italicised texts to which they refer. His theology is carefully justified.

Baxter too brings the authority of the Bible to persuade his readers. He layers quotation upon quotation in his insistence that the wicked man should turn to God or die. He challenges his readers, demanding, 'if you doubt whether this be the Word of God or not, besides an hundred other Texts you may be satisfied with these few.'⁵⁷ The rest of the page is filled with italicised texts reinforcing his message. Lackington's own writing was particularly characterised by his use of quotations, layered like Baxter's Biblical references, for emphasis.

Lackington continued to shop in 'old-book shops' both in the West country and after his move to London. He broadened the scope of his reading by selecting

⁵⁶ Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p. 83.

⁵⁷ Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*, p. 5.

'Plato on the Immortality of the Soul, Plutarch's Morals, Seneca's Morals, Epicurus's Morals, the Morals of Confucius the Chinese Philosopher, and a few others' (M., p. 168). By the time he came to use his small collection to form the basis of the stock for his bookshop, his library included:

Fletcher's Checks to Antinomianism, &c. 5 volumes; Watts's Improvement of the Mind; Young's Night Thoughts; Wake's Translation of the Apostolical Epistles; Fleetwood's Life of Christ; the first twenty numbers of Hinton's Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences; some of Wesley's Journals, and some of the pious lives published by him; and about a dozen other volumes of the latter sort, besides odd magazines, &c. (M., pp. 216–17).

These titles still identify Lackington as a Methodist. They are predominantly religious with works such as William Wake's *The Genuine Epistles of the Apostolic Fathers* (1693) and John Fleetwood's *The Life of Our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (1766). John Fletcher's *Five Checks to Antinomianism*, which began in 1771 with his *Vindication of the Rev. Mr Wesley's Last Minutes*, vigorously defended Wesley's Arminian stance. Once again, we are given little specific information about the other Wesleyan books which Lackington owned. The collection does show a strong inclination on the part of the owner to expand his knowledge. Isaac Watts's *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741) was a highly popular work guiding its readers on how to learn through judicious reading and study. This, coupled with John Barrow's *New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* published by John Hinton in 1751, suggests that Lackington was actively pursuing his further education.

Conclusion

What is so striking about Lackington's early reading is how small a part works of the imagination play in his first encounters with books. We know that he came across *The History of the Gentle Craft* whilst staying with the Bowdens, that he

owned copies of *Paradise Lost*, John Gay's *Fables*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, and that he read John Pomfret's poems over and over again until he had memorised them. For the most part, however, he seems to have encountered religious books and practical books such as almanacs and various manuals. This is partly explained by his Methodist leanings. C. John Sommerville points out in his study of religious best-sellers that these books were 'cheap enough and circulated sufficiently for almost anyone to have access to them' and they were purchased out of religious interest.⁵⁸ The very ubiquity of some of the Nonconformist titles owned and read by Lackington, works by Baxter, Shepard, and Bunyan, suggests that they formed a staple in the libraries and book collections of many eighteenth century readers reminding us of the influence of Puritan writers in shaping future generations of readers and thinkers. Lackington's reading practices as a young man also remind us, as St Clair points out, that 'most texts in the Romantic period were produced long before'.⁵⁹ Keeble reassesses the influence of the literary style prevalent in the work of Dissenting authors, asserting that it was not as sectarian and retrogressive as their contemporaries portrayed it:

It was rather creative, positive and salutary in its demotic realism, its subjective authenticity, its metaphysical richness and its sensitivity to the numinous. In these respects it anticipated a later, and greater, literary movement: its tendency is towards the work not of Pope but of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, men who admired not only the genius of Milton, as the eighteenth century had done, but also that of Bunyan and Baxter, as the eighteenth century had not.⁶⁰

Lackington was soon to turn away from these texts and broaden his reading to include books he had previously shunned. Yet he never lost his faith in the vital

⁵⁸ C. John Sommerville, *Popular Religion in Restoration England* (Gainesville: University of Florida Monographs, 1977), p. 24.

⁵⁹ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 42.

⁶⁰ Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p. 283.

importance of the printed word in his life, a lesson inculcated by the example of Baxter, Shepard, Bunyan, and the extraordinary publishing endeavours of John Wesley.

Chapter Three

READING AND FREE-THINKING

After establishing in Chapter 2 the importance of Methodism in motivating Lackington to learn to read, this chapter traces how he was lured away from religious subjects and religion itself by reading much more broadly. Lackington writes in his *Memoirs* that during his early days as a bookseller 'there was one class of books . . . I would not sell'. He continues, 'I conscientiously destroyed such books as fell into my hands which were written by free-thinkers', confirming that he would neither read them himself nor sell them to others (*M.*, p. 223). This situation was to change, however, since not long after this, he not only learned the names of those authors 'as had wrote on the side of infidelity' but sought out their 'pernicious productions' and read them (*C.*, p. 4). This chapter will explore Lackington's reading of free-thinking books.¹ It will examine evidence in both his *Memoirs* and *The Confessions* to explain the dramatic change which occurred in his reading and show how this shaped his life and his writing.

Lackington describes this shift in his intellectual interests most vividly in *The Confessions*, where what he was confessing was his movement away from Methodism towards secular, often anti-clerical reading. *The Confessions* is indeed marked by revulsion for the authors he embraced so warmly during his middle years. Its language contrasts markedly with the earlier *Memoirs* which is redolent with the language of free-thinking and, especially in its later editions,

¹ I will follow the example of the 1794 edition of *Memoirs* by using 'free-thinker' and 'free-thinking' with a hyphen but not a capital (as in the first edition).

abounds with references to philosophers and *philosophes* associated with religious scepticism. As we shall see the *Memoirs* is a markedly 'free-thinking' text.

Reading free-thinkers

Early in 1776, soon after recovering from the illness which killed his first wife and which had almost lost him his business, Lackington married Dorcas Turton, a schoolmistress who loved books. This appears to have heralded his happiest and most expansive years as a reader and as a businessman. It also marks the moment when he began to neglect Methodist worship and explored the 'infidel' writers whose works had caused him such concern just months earlier. He writes:

My mind began to expand, intellectual light and pleasure broke in and dispelled the gloom of fanatical melancholy; the sourness of my natural temper, which had been much increased by superstition, (called by Swift, "the spleen of the soul,") in part gave way, and was succeeded by cheerfulness, and some degree of good-nature (*M.*, pp. 260–61).

This passage resounds with the language of rational enlightenment and the watchwords of free-thinking anti-clericalism. It is important to note that Lackington associates his Methodist beliefs with 'superstition'. He portrays his religious life as one characterised by 'fanatical melancholy' and suggests that the antidote to this maudlin state was the 'pleasure' afforded by 'intellectual light'. It comes as little surprise to read soon after, when Lackington describes the process of learning, that he moved rapidly from divinity to free-thinking writers:

As to the little knowledge of literature I possess, it was acquired by dint of application. In the beginning I attached myself very closely to the study of divinity and moral philosophy, so that I became tolerably acquainted with all the points controverted between divines; after having read the great champions for christianity, I next read the works of Toulmin, Lord Herbert, Tindal, Chubb, Morgan, Collins, Hammond, Woolston, Annet, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, D'Argens,

Bolingbroke, Williams, Helvetius, Voltaire, and many other free-thinkers. (*M.*, p. 398)²

This account is similar to the one he would give in *The Confessions* where he records his own progress 'from serious godliness to infidelity' in the fictional person of 'Dick Thrifty' (*C.*, p. 9). Dick begins his philosophical journey with 'a good deal of polemical divinity' before moving on to more 'pernicious' works:

He then got acquainted with some, who having given up one point of Christian doctrine after another, had, in the end, become downright infidels. These acquaintances advised him to read the works of Chubb, Tyndal, Morgan, Collins, Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Bolingbroke, Hume, &c. Before Dick had read a quarter part of those books, he, like me and others, quitted his religious connexions. (*C.* p.9)

Some authors mentioned in the various editions of *Memoirs* are omitted from this list whilst David Hume is added, but the important point is that Lackington is clear that by reading the works of free-thinkers, his religious faith was shaken. These lists of writers demand further investigation as does the term 'free-thinker', which Lackington uses in its broadest sense to suggest a variety of different challenges to clerical authority and religion.

Terminology and labels are problematic when teasing out the beliefs of these writers. Many terms were bandied about pejoratively so it is useful to turn to Anthony Collins who provides a concise explanation of 'free-thinking', as:

The Use of the Understanding, in endeavouring to find out the Meaning of any Proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of the Evidence for or against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming Force or Weakness of the Evidence.³

As this suggests, and as Isabel Rivers observes, free-thinking can be identified not so much by a particular set of beliefs, as by a frame of mind or method of enquiry.

Rivers points out that the various controversies which comprise free-thinking

² Lackington adds the names 'Toulmin', 'Hammond', 'D'Argens' and 'Helvetius' to those given in the first edition.

³ Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of Free Thinking Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect Call'd Freethinkers* (London: n.p., 1713), p. 5.

could not be classed as a cohesive movement although they shared certain features. These include anti-clericalism, an emphasis on natural religion (the belief that God and nature are one), and the use of reason to probe the mysteries of the universe.⁴

Free-thinking emerged in England towards the end of the seventeenth century. It drew upon classical texts, particularly those of the Stoics and Epicureans. An expansion in trade and exploration brought greater knowledge of the beliefs and lives of peoples living beyond Europe, in the Americas, China, Japan, and India, to English shores. Scientific discoveries were revealing the ways in which natural forces such as gravity operated on matter. This vision of nature as governed by material rather than divine forces seemed to confirm the doctrines of the Greek philosopher, Epicurus (341–271 BC), who derived from Democritus the idea that the world was constructed not of matter and spirit, but of atoms – indestructible particles, from which all life was constructed and to which all matter returned. Humans too, according to Epicurus, were made up of atoms – mind, body and soul.

Epicurus's ideas were disseminated in the poem, *De Rerum Natura*, by Titus Lucretius, which was translated by Thomas Creech (1659–1700) in 1682 and reprinted throughout the eighteenth century. Lackington includes three quotations from this translation in his work.⁵ Lucretius challenged the notions of life after death, writing:

*NIL IGITUR mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum,
quandoquidem natura animi mortalis habetur.*

⁴ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language or Religion and Ethics in England 1660–1780. Volume 2 Shaftesbury to Hume*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), II, pp. 8–11.

⁵ See *Memoirs* pp. 283, 287 and *The Confessions*, p. 11.

Death, therefore, is nothing to us and does not concern us in the least, since the nature of our souls is mortal.⁶

The implications of these lines for Lucretius were enormous. He sought to free humanity from anxiety about the whims of the gods, who were, he insisted, not concerned in human affairs. Instead, he urged people to live a life governed by reason rather than fear of death and the afterlife. Such ideas were taken up by philosophers like Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), a French Huguenot refugee who fled to Holland. Bayle considered that philosophical reason was the only antidote to the poison of superstition and idolatry which he saw blighting society.⁷

It was a short step from Epicureanism to atheism, the rejection of the existence of all gods, which explains why so many free-thinkers were branded as ‘atheists’, and no doubt some of them were. However, the branch of free-thinking which Lackington alludes to most frequently, particularly in *The Confessions* is not ‘atheism’ but ‘Deism’.⁸ Deism retains the idea of a god, arguing that reason, the ultimate arbiter, suggests that the universe must have been created by, and is governed by, a supreme intelligence. Like Epicurus’s gods, this creator God had

⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura Book III*, ed. by E. J. Kenney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 64.

⁷ See Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 674–77. During his lifetime, Bayle insisted that he was Christian, but Israel questions this, arguing that fideism is inconsistent with Bayle’s condemnation of superstition, *ibid.*, pp. 146–47. Thomas Lennon and Michael Hickson similarly point to the difficulty of pinning down Bayle’s beliefs, noting that ‘according to just the twentieth-century interpretations, Bayle might have been a positivist, an atheist, a deist, a skeptic, a fideist, a Socinian, a liberal Calvinist, a conservative Calvinist, a libertine, a Judaizing Christian, a Judeo-Christian, or even a secret Jew, a Manichean, an existentialist.’ Lennon, Thomas M. and Hickson, Michael, “Pierre Bayle”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/bayle/> [accessed 16 July 2013]

⁸ In his contemporary explanation of the rise of Deism, William Stephens (1647–1718) accuses some men of pretending to hold Deist views who were in fact simply ‘Men of loose and sensual Lives’. He terms them ‘meer Sceptics, and practical Atheists, rather than real Deists’. See Stephens, *An Account of the Growth of Deism in England* (London: for the author, 1696), n.p.

no interest in human affairs. It therefore follows that there can be no divine manifestations on earth such as miracles or revelation.⁹

Sarah Ellenzweig sets these ideas within the context of the religious wars which had raged in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She observes that in England the deist and other free-thinkers' denial of revelation may have arisen from a reaction against the 'enthusiasm' of the radical Protestant sects which flourished during the English Civil War and which were seen by many as being highly detrimental to social order.¹⁰ Lackington's own embrace of deist ideas may, in part, have been a reaction to Methodist 'enthusiasm'.

In *The Confessions*, Lackington accuses 'Christian deists' of beginning his slide into infidelity:

Dick boasted of being a rational Christian, and talked much of Chubb as being a very sensible, clear writer. After Dick had read Tyndal, Collins, Morgan, and Shaftesbury, he was then a Christian deist. Before Dick had gone through Voltaire's deistical pieces, he gave up Christ entirely, and was a philosophical deist; and pitied the poor ignorant Christians for suffering themselves to be kept in the dark. But Dick had not quite finished Bolingbroke's philosophical works before he was, from a dignified philosopher, sunk down to a reasoning brute. He had lost his immortal, immaterial part in the labyrinths of metaphysics. Voltaire's Ignorant Philosopher made Dick a Sceptic; Helvetius and Hume gave the finishing stroke to the picture; poor Dick was then an atheist! (C., pp. 9–10)

Lackington here describes Matthew Tindal (1657–1733), Anthony Collins (1676–1729), Thomas Morgan (d. 1743), and Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713) as writers who persuaded him to adopt 'Christian deism', or the idea that Christianity should be subject to testing by reason. Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1731) takes a typically deist stance, arguing that morality and reason, rather than tradition or Scripture, should be the test of the truth of Christianity. Morgan and

⁹ See, 'Deism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/> [accessed 16 April, 2013]

¹⁰ Sarah Ellenzweig, *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient History, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660–1760* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 39.

two other writers whom Lackington lists in his *Memoirs* as having read, Thomas Chubb (1679–1747) and Thomas Woolston (1670–1733), might be classed as ‘Christian deists’ – whereas, according to Jonathan Israel, Shaftesbury may be identified as a ‘radical deist’ and Collins as an atheist.¹¹

In his study of the political and philosophical beliefs of the Enlightenment, Israel explains this productive, often turbulent time in European intellectual life as the result of competing forces of change and conservatism. He describes a moderate mainstream Enlightenment competing with a Radical Enlightenment whilst both were challenged by a series of counter-enlightenments.¹² Whilst moderate thinkers tried to reconcile the differences emerging between the forces of reason and religion, and maintain institutions such as the monarchy, radical thinkers challenged the authority of traditional institutions and demanded new rights.

One such radical philosopher was Voltaire, poet, dramatist and satirist, whose deistical writings Lackington cites, in *The Confessions*, as contributing to his loss of faith. As we shall see, Lackington greatly admired this *philosophe*. Voltaire had been profoundly influenced by Newtonian science whilst living in England in exile from France. He acquired what Israel terms ‘*Anglicisme*’ or a belief inspired by his time in England that oppressive monarchy had been overturned there by the ‘Glorious Revolution’, and that superstition had been replaced by experimental philosophy as practised by Bacon, Boyle, Newton and Locke. This had resulted, he declared, in nothing less than a series of ‘*revolutions*

¹¹ Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 346.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

de l'esprit humain'. He hoped to inspire a similar revolution of the human spirit in France. Voltaire was a trenchant critic of superstition and religious bigotry.¹³

Lackington includes other foreign writers in the list of free-thinkers he presents in his *Memoirs*: the radical sceptic Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), whose *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) sought to expose the innate self-interest of men and nations; Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis D'Argens (1703–1771), a French radical *philosophe*, and Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771). D'Argens was interested in the roots of Judaism, which he portrays as pure and unencumbered by dogma. Helvétius, castigated by Lackington for leading him to atheism, was probably a pantheist rather than atheist, believing that the idea of god and nature were inseparable, but his *Traité de l'Esprit* (1758) provoked furious charges of atheism from church and state.

It is easy to understand why Lackington felt that reading the works of these writers challenged a faith which had been nurtured under the guidance of John Wesley who, as we have seen, exerted considerable control on the Christian Library he prepared for his followers. Some writers on Lackington's list of free-thinkers produced works considered so inflammatory that they were only published posthumously. One such writer is Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751), whose collected works (1754) were received with hostility by Samuel Johnson and William Warburton amongst others. He was deeply critical of Scriptures and saw man as just a link in the chain of being in the universe, removing the special status accorded to humanity in Genesis. It is

¹³ Ibid., p. 357; see also J.M. Robertson, *A History of Freethought*, 2 vols. (London: Watts & Co, 1936), II, pp. 814–32; and David Williams, 'Arouet, François-Marie [Voltaire] (1694–1778)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68321> [accessed 19 Sept 2012]

probably for this reason that Lackington quips that he became a 'reasoning brute' after reading the works of Bolingbroke.¹⁴

In *The Confessions*, Lackington accuses Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) of giving the 'finishing stroke' to Dick Thrifty's belief in God. Significantly, he does not mention Hume in his *Memoirs*, although there is ample evidence in this first autobiography that he had read the works of this sceptical, sometimes controversial philosopher.¹⁵ Hume, like Bolingbroke, was a historian and, in common with many other writers admired by Lackington (such as Shaftesbury and Helvétius), was interested in the relationship between morality and religion. He argued that the basis of morality lay in human life, passions, sentiments and affections and that human experience could not extend beyond the limits of human knowledge to encompass any god. His position denied any possible divine influence on morality; indeed he regarded Christianity as having had a negative effect on ethics. Instead he turned to classical writers for insights, particularly Cicero and Epicurus.¹⁶ Rivers has no doubt that Hume's contemporaries saw him as 'a sceptic, an infidel, and an atheist'.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, ideas such as those promulgated by Hume, Voltaire, and Helvétius were not always well received by those in power. These writers, Justin Champion argues, were not simply promoting the powers of human reason to interpret the world, but were attacking 'the perceived injustice of the distribution of authority in society', specifically the deeply held authority of Christian

¹⁴ H. T. Dickinson, 'St John, Henry, styled first Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24496>, [accessed 19 Sept 2012]

¹⁵ See *Memoirs*, pp. 95, 168, 413.

¹⁶ See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: Shaftesbury to Hume*, pp. 238–50. See also John Robertson, 'Hume, David (1711–1776)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14141>, [accessed 19 Sept 2012]

¹⁷ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: Shaftesbury to Hume*, p. 238.

churches to determine matters of public morality and virtue.¹⁸ It was perhaps for this reason that Edmund Burke, when challenging those writers whose works he considered had led to revolution in France in 1789, tried to downplay the influence of radical writers in England:

I admit that we too have had writers of that description, who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world.¹⁹

The list of philosophical influences we find referred to in the *Memoirs* reads very much as Lackington's response to Burke's challenge, particularly in view of the support for French liberty found in the 1792 edition. Lackington did not just acknowledge that he had read free-thinking authors, his *Memoirs* is full of references and allusions to their work as well as quotations from them.

Evidence of free-thinking in *Memoirs*

Lackington's free-thinking sympathies become very much more pronounced in the later editions of his *Memoirs*. He develops the critique of Methodism which was evident in the first edition, using distinctly free-thinking terminology to cast his former companions as religious fanatics, displaying 'enthusiasm' and 'superstition'. Methodist ideas of virtue and right behaviour are, he suggests, distorted by their unreasonable beliefs and he backs up his arguments with quotations from Voltaire, Hume, Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794), Michel de

¹⁸ J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 11.

¹⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 89.

Montaigne (1533–1592), Francois de la Rochefoucauld (1613–1680) and others.²⁰ Not all of these quotations are attributed (perhaps to avoid censure in some cases) but they reveal Lackington's familiarity with the debates raised by these writers.

The most prominent example of such discussion can be found in Letter XXVII on fanaticism, added to the 1793 edition and retained in all subsequent editions of *Memoirs* (*M.*, pp. 280–288). The previous letter described how, after having left 'Mr Wesley's society, and begun to talk a little more like a rational being', Lackington had incurred the 'hatred' of some of his former companions (*M.*, p. 272). Letter XXVII begins with an extract from Samuel Roger's 'Ode to Superstition' before launching into an attack on Rousseau's apparent defence of 'fanaticism'.²¹ Rousseau argues (writes Lackington) that whilst he agrees with Pierre Bayle that 'Fanaticism is more pernicious than Atheism', nonetheless it 'elevates the heart of man' and 'raises him above the fear of death'. It is, argues Rousseau, the very antithesis of the 'argumentative spirit of controversy and philosophy' which 'concentrates all passions in the baseness of self-interest' (*M.*, p. 281). It is hard to imagine a passage less welcome to a new convert to rational empiricism and perhaps unsurprisingly Lackington accuses Rousseau of 'a fit of insanity' (*M.*, p. 283). He also leaps to the defence of free-thinking, declaring that Plutarch, Francis Bacon, and Bayle had all confirmed that 'superstition was worse than Atheism', and he goes on to defend his position by invoking other writers in support of his case: an unnamed 'great authority'; Plutarch (again); one he terms 'a much greater man than Rousseau'; and the philosopher John Locke (*M.*, pp.

²⁰ Quotations by Voltaire and Hume are discussed below. See *Memoirs*, for references to Beccaria, p. 287; Montaigne, pp. 253, 407, and 431; and La Rochefoucauld, pp. 186 and 290.

²¹ The passage in question comes originally from Rousseau's *Emilius and Sophia: A New System of Education* (1762) and warns against the selfish egotism of some philosophers. It can also be found in *Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. by Henrietta Colebrooke (London: J. Debrett and R. Baldwin, 1788), p. 11.

282–88). There is an air of mystery surrounding the un-named author or authors and Lackington appears to have given his disagreement with Rousseau much thought.

In fact the ‘great authority’ and ‘much greater man than Rousseau’ are one and the same – Voltaire – whose work Lackington refers to several times in the *Memoirs*. The passages he refers to in his rebuttal of Rousseau can also be found under the heading ‘Fanaticism’ (pp. 182–83) in *The Philosophical Dictionary: From The French Of M. De Voltaire* published by Lackington himself in 1785. He is similarly reticent about mentioning his great admiration for this writer elsewhere in his autobiography. In Letter XXV, which describes his embrace of enlightenment ideas, Lackington includes two quotations from Tobias Smollett and Thomas Francklin’s translation of Voltaire’s poems. The first couplet, taken from ‘Upon Moderation in all Things, Study, Ambition and Pleasure’, he credits to ‘VOLTAIRE by Francklin’ (*M.*, p. 264).²² The second, longer extract follows a quip by Lackington that he will not get lost in the dark mazes of metaphysics. He declares that he will ‘adopt the language of one of the greatest men that ever existed’ before quoting from ‘Prayer’, a direct address to God found at the end of Voltaire’s ‘The Law of Nature: A Poem’, which is highly critical of religious bigotry (*M.*, pp. 264–65). Lackington provides another example of Voltaire’s criticism of superstition in two lines taken from *The Henriade*, his play about Henry of Navarre (*M.*, p. 273).

It might be that in the turbulent atmosphere of the ‘Terror’ following the death of King Louis XVI, Lackington was reluctant to advertise his admiration for the *philosophe* whose work was credited with inspiring revolution. His allusions

²² See ‘Upon Moderation In All Things, Study, Ambition and Pleasure’ and ‘Prayer’ in Tobias Smollett and Thomas Francklin, *Miscellaneous Poems* (London: J. Newbery, R. Baldwin and others, 1764), pp. 9 and 93. This is volume 33 of their *The Works of M. De Voltaire* (1761–81).

are clear to fellow admirers but are not flaunted. In the seventh edition, produced later in 1794, Lackington feels he needs to explain the inclusion of a passage by Voltaire attacking papal excesses and abuses in the Renaissance.²³ He advises readers that 'Voltaire is not writing as a Deist, but as a real Christian, and is proving that such priests as lived such diabolical lives could never believe in the religion which they taught to others' (*M.*, 1795, p. 204). This passage follows a document purporting to be from a Methodist apparently defaming John Wesley. The coupling of Voltaire's accusations against the corrupt Popes of the high Renaissance and rumours spread about the recently deceased Wesley suggest that in 1795 Lackington was still fiercely anti-Methodist, even if he does display some anxiety about citing a passage which might be perceived as being 'Deist' in inspiration.

As mentioned earlier, Lackington is also careful not to mention another writer he admired, David Hume. In Letter VII he criticises Methodists for frightening congregations with 'threats of hell and damnation' and bringing about needless misery and depression (*M.*, p. 93). He quotes Cicero's belief that the superstitious man 'is miserable in every scene, in every incident in life' (*M.*, p. 95). He further condemns Methodistical manipulation by referring to an incident in 1764 when a Methodist preacher named Reilly was accused of terrorising an old woman, Mrs Norton, into making him a gift of fifty pounds a year. The judge, Lord Northington, ruled against Reilly.²⁴ Lackington concludes his letter by quoting the words of 'a great man':

Love or anger, ambition or avarice (says a great man) have their root in the temper and affections, which the soundest reason is scarce able

²³ Since the 7th edition is identical to the 10th edition published in 1795, I shall refer to the 1795 edition in order to avoid confusing the two different editions produced in 1794.

²⁴ See No. XVIII, *Collectanea Juridica*, ed. Francis Hargrave (London: E. & R. Brooke, 1791) I, p. 458.

fully to correct; but superstition, being founded on false opinion, must immediately vanish, when true philosophy has inspired juster sentiments of superior powers. (*M.*, pp. 97–8)

The ‘great man’ in this instance is Hume and the passage, together with the extract from Cicero’s *De Divinitate*, can be found in his essay ‘On Suicide’, which supports the liberty of individuals to take their own lives. This was published posthumously and had been suppressed by Hume during his lifetime because of the danger of prosecution faced by his publisher, Andrew Millar (1707–68). Unauthorised editions appeared in 1777 and 1783.²⁵ The 1783 edition contained notes which, the editor writes, ‘are intended to expose the sophistry contained in the original essays’.²⁶ Lackington may have been uneasy about appearing to promote this controversial essay by naming his source.

The passage Lackington refers to can also be found re-titled as ‘Philosophy The Only Remedy To A Mind Diseased’, and published in *The Beauties of Hume and Bolingbroke* (1782). The editor of this collection explains:

Two Essays, one on Suicide, and the other on the Immortality of the Soul, being handed about as the production of Mr Hume, in a compilation of this kind it was thought they could not with propriety be overlooked. We have reserved, however, our extracts from them to a Supplement; as engrossing them in the body of the work would have given them a distinction for which they were not certainly originally meant.²⁷

This volume might also be the source for another quotation used by Lackington which this time is attributed to Hume. It concerns women reading books of ‘gallantry and devotion’ and was presumably not considered to be controversial (*M.*, p. 124).²⁸ Lackington explicitly attributes two further quotes to Hume: one

²⁵ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, II, p. 275.

²⁶ David Hume, *Essays on Suicide and the Immortality of the Soul Ascribed to the Late David Hume Esq* (London: printed for M. Smith, 1783), p. iv.

²⁷ *The Beauties of Hume and Bolingbroke* (London: Kearsley, 1782), p. 255.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–72.

from his essay 'On the Middle Station of Life', and another from his poem 'To a Very Poring and Speculative Gentleman' (*M.*, pp. 413, 168).²⁹

These references raise the question of what text it was that Lackington was actually reading. Did he read Hume's *Essays* in their complete published form or as reprinted in *The Beauties of Hume and Bolingbroke*? He states that he read the passage from Rousseau, not in *Emilius and Sophia*, but in volume one, page 11, of *Thoughts of Jean Jacques Rousseau* (1788) (*M.*, p. 280). The quotations from Locke and Voltaire on pages 283 and 285 could have been selected from the four-volume *The Philosophical Dictionary or Opinions of Modern Philosophers on Metaphysical, Moral or Political Subjects* (1786) by Franz Swediauer (1748–1824), where they occur under the headings 'Enthusiasm' on page 266 and 'Fanaticism' on page 322. It may be that Burke was correct and that few people read Bolingbroke 'through', but many, like Lackington, could have gained access to controversial free-thinking debates and the views of key writers through reading selections and the edited highlights of their writings.

Given that Lackington published a translation of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1752) in 1785, a few years before the storming of the Bastille, and taking into account his stated admiration for this writer, it would seem reasonable to assume that he was familiar with this and perhaps other works of Voltaire. *The Philosophical Dictionary* contains repeated condemnation of religious institutions for abuses of power. In his examples of fanaticism, Voltaire cites the St Bartholomew Day's Massacre in 1572 during which French Huguenots were murdered in Paris by a Catholic army after they had gathered to celebrate the marriage of Margaret of Valois to Henry of Navarre. Voltaire's thoughts on

²⁹ David Hume 'The Middle Station of Life' in *Essays Moral and Political*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, R. Fleming, A. Alison, 1742), II, p. 47; 'To A Very Poring And Speculative Gentleman' in *Edinburgh Miscellany* (Edinburgh: J. Meuen & Company, 1720), p. 102.

'Atheism' concern those who have been charged with this crime by religious authorities anxious to halt challenges to their power. His thoughts on 'Superstition' focus on the absurdity of all those through the centuries who attached meaning to rituals like Catholic Confession believed to eradicate heinous sins.

It is very much within the framework of Voltaire's anti-clericalism that Lackington wrote about his life as a Methodist. He talks about preachers abusing their position of power by 'heaping all the curses in the Bible on the heads of the most virtuous as well as the most vicious', and performing 'a kind of hocus pocus' in order to transform criminals into saints for their own purposes (*M.*, pp. 87, 292). Again, he writes that congregations are '*hocus pocusly converted*' by fear of hell created by the artful rhetoric of preachers (*M.*, pp. 93–4). These and other instances of 'priestcraft', he asserts, are practiced upon superstitious enthusiasts. Lackington writes that his first wife Nancy was 'very enthusiastical to an extreme, and of course very superstitious and visionary' (*M.*, p. 227). He himself had also been 'visionary and superstitious' (*M.*, p. 201).

In *Memoirs*, preachers are usually referred to as 'enthusiasts' or religious fanatics. Lackington allows that John Wesley was 'one of the most respectable enthusiasts that ever lived' but he damns him with faint praise (*M.*, p. 301). Ronald Stromberg, like Ellenzweig, observes that free-thinking, by promoting reason over faith, can be seen as a reaction against the social consequences of 'enthusiasm' in the age of the sectaries.³⁰ After the positive reception of the first edition of his *Memoirs*, Lackington added 'many *original humorous* Stories, and *droll Anecdotes*' to subsequent editions and most of these poke fun at Methodists.

³⁰ Ronald Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 13.

Rivers identifies irony and ridicule as tools widely used by free-thinkers in their assaults upon the clergy. She analyses Collins's distinctive use of humour as a rhetorical device in *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713) and *A Discourse Concerning Ridicule and Irony in Writing* (1729).³¹ Lackington claimed to have read Collins so he may have been influenced by these works, although no clear evidence of this remains. He does however quote from Beccaria on the use of ridicule:

Painful and corporal punishment (says Beccaria) should never be applied to fanaticism, for being founded on pride, it glories in persecution. Infamy and ridicule only should be employed against fanatics; if the first, their pride will be overbalanced by the pride of the people; and we judge of the power of the second, if we consider that even truth is obliged to summon all her force, attacked with error armed with ridicule. (*M.*, pp. 287–88)

This extract can be found on page 86 of *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (1767). This English translation included a commentary attributed to Voltaire. Beccaria probed the nature of crimes and punishment in this work, which recognises that notions of criminal behaviour are man-made and tend to change according to the prevailing ideas of the age.

It is possible that Lackington read some or all of this work for he takes upon himself the role of judge in condemning the crimes of Methodist leaders who preached abstinence on the Sabbath but 'would themselves not even *sup*, without roasted fowls, &c.' (*M.*, p. 266). There is an attempt at jocularly in some of the instances of clerical hypocrisy Lackington cites. These include strange 'shaggy dog' stories involving mistaken identity, swearing parrots, or ignorance. Lackington also includes tales of superstitious beliefs intended to expose the credulity of Methodist believers.

³¹ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, II, pp. 38–41.

Lackington drew on the work of many other writers who subjected religious 'fanatics' to ridicule and infamy. There are numerous quotations from Samuel Butler's popular satire on 'enthusiasm', *Hudibras* (1663), which was born of the same reaction against the Protestant sects of the mid-seventeenth century that contributed to the rise of free-thinking.³² He also added quotations from more recent satires against religion to later editions of his *Memoirs*. These include Evan Lloyd's poem 'The Methodist' (1766); Mary O'Brien's 'The Pious Incendiaries: Or Fanaticism Display'd' (1785), a poem about the Gordon Riots; Thomas Prall's poetic essay 'Superstition' (1792); and 'The Fanatic's Sabbath' from *Trifles in Verse* by 'A Young Officer' (1784).³³ He quotes from Samuel Foote's play, *The Minor* (1760) which ridicules Methodism, and refers to a popular caricature, 'Dr. Squintum's Exaltation or the Reformation' (1763), mocking George Whitefield.³⁴ This shows 'Dr. Squintum' (Whitefield) preaching whilst a devil whispers in his ear (see Figure 6). As well as reading the works of free-thinkers, Lackington appears to have immersed himself in the works of many others who ridiculed Methodists as heirs to the 'enthusiastical' religious sects of the seventeenth century. Many of these writers had imbibed the methods of the free-thinkers, even if they were not free-thinkers themselves.

Lackington's Introduction to Free-thinking

The force with which Lackington switched from devout Methodist practice to equally devout rationalism is striking and demands investigation. Was this really as sudden a transition as his account in *Memoirs* suggests? It is possible that the

³² For references to *Hudibras*, see *Memoirs*, pp. 81, 82, 127, 156, 157, 159, 162, 236, 298, 301.

³³ For examples of quotations from Lloyd, see *Memoirs*, pp. xxvii, 80, 156, 329; from O'Brien, pp. 108, 112, 116; from Prall, pp. 53, 63, 136; from 'A Young Officer', p. 109.

³⁴ For references to Foote, see *Memoirs*, pp. 84, 106, 107; for 'Dr Squintum', p. 181.

Figure 6: *Dr. Squintum's Exaltation or The Reformation* (1763)

Cartoon showing Rev. George Whitefield standing on a three-legged stool, and preaching in the open air; an imp pouring inspiration through a clyster-pipe into his ear; a grotesque Fame, being a female evil-spirit, listens to his discourse with an ear-trumpet, and repeats it in an ordinary trumpet; the Devil clutches gold from under his stool; etc.

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change was brought about by the Lackingtons' move to London, away from the field preachers and the dissenting traditions of Taunton and the West Country? Stromberg quotes the Nonconformist Philip Doddridge's observation made in 1726 that 'an atheist or a deist is a monstrous kind of creature, which in the country we only know by report.'³⁵ Or, as is suggested by Wesley's fears about the fickle faith of booksellers, Lackington's change of heart may have come about as a result of his access to more books.

We know that whilst he was still absorbed in reading the works of Baxter, Bunyan and Wesley, Lackington was also studying 'Walker's poetical paraphrase of Epictetus's morals' (*M.*, p.153). He wrote of this book:

The principles of the *stoics* charmed me so much, that I made the book my companion wherever I went, and read it over and over in raptures, thinking that my mind was secured against all the smiles or frowns of fortune. (*M.*, p. 154)

A little later he considers further the impact this work had upon his attitude to misfortune when, following the loss of most of a small inheritance from his grandfather, he writes:

I recollected that Seneca had said, "A wise and good man is proof against all accidents of fate; and that a brave man is a match for fortune["]; and knowing myself to be both *wise, good* and *brave*, I bore the loss of my silver with the temper of a stoick, and like Epictetus reasoned, that I could not have lost it, if I had not first had it; and that as I had lost it, why it was all the same as though it had never been in my possession. (*M.*, p. 208)

Stoic philosophy was hugely influential in shaping the thoughts of many free-thinking writers of both the moderate and radical Enlightenments. Stromberg and Rivers show Shaftesbury to have been deeply influenced by Stoic writing.³⁶ Israel analyses the similarities between Stoic philosophy and that of radical Dutch philosopher, Spinoza. For the Stoics, the universe was pervaded by reason, the

³⁵ Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32 and see Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, II, p. 93.

apotheosis of which was 'God'. True religion depended, not on superstitious ideas, but on acquiring the right notion about God and nature through the use of reason. Reason was necessary in attaining to virtue which would lead to true happiness. Israel notes that both the Stoics and Spinoza rejected the idea of disembodied spirits and supernatural forces: they understood men to be determined in their thoughts, desires and conduct, and believed that reality was a single coherent whole governed by rationally ordered rules. Importantly perhaps for Lackington, Pierre Bayle had observed that Spinozists and Stoics differed in their attitude to God for the Stoics held that the cosmos was ruled by a deity who directed all that occurred whilst Spinoza was an atheist.³⁷

Lackington appears to have heeded Stoic lessons in transcending the vicissitudes of life through rational thought. His immersion in the morals of Epictetus may have laid the foundations a few years later for his interest in free-thinking. The elevation of reason as the 'most important facet of humanity' and one possible conclusion to be drawn from this – that 'true religion and reason became one and the same thing' – was particularly attractive to many free-thinkers.³⁸

As noted in Chapter 2, Lackington had also bought 'Plato on the Immortality of the Soul, Plutarch's Morals, Seneca's Morals, Epicurus's Morals, the Morals of Confucius the Chinese Philosopher' and a few other books of this nature (*M.*, p. 168). He writes that these made 'a very deep and lasting impression on my mind'. Once again we see Lackington reading texts which prepared him for the radical shift to follow. Robertson ascribes to Bishop Burnet a comment on Sir William Temple who was apparently 'a great admirer of the

³⁷ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 460–462.

³⁸ Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, p. 210.

sect of Confucius in China, who were atheists themselves, but left religion to the rabble.' Robertson notes that the praise of Confucius was 'the mark of deism'.³⁹ Similarly, Israel emphasises the appeal that the rational structure of Confucianism held for radical thinkers like Bayle and Malebranche. For Bayle it represented an example of atheist beliefs sustaining a system of morality, proving that Christianity was not necessary for the foundation of moral order.⁴⁰

The edition of Epicurus's *Morals* mentioned by Lackington is probably a 1712 edition translated by John Digby with an essay by Charles, seigneur de Saint Évremond (1610–1703) which is quoted in *Memoirs* (*M.*, pp. 172–73). Lackington's understanding of Epicureanism as teaching 'that the true felicity of life is to be free from perturbations, to understand our duty towards God and Man, and to enjoy the present without any anxious dependence upon the future; not to amuse ourselves either with hopes or fears' reads as a sober antithesis to the 'heart religion' of John Wesley (*M.*, pp. 173–4). We know that Lackington cited Plutarch in his arguments against fanaticism. Many of these classical writers had been read in the sixteenth century and 'systematically if mostly unwittingly misrepresented in a conventionally Christian sense'.⁴¹ Saint Évremond, however, was a sceptic and it seems to have been only a small step for Lackington to relinquish elements of Christian revelation and subscribe wholeheartedly to a rationalist view of the world.

It was around the time of his marriage to Dorcas, his mind prepared by classical philosophy, that Lackington read *The Life of John Bunce Esq* (1756–63) by Thomas Amory (1691–1788) and, as he saw it, was liberated from the shackles of Methodism. He writes:

³⁹ Robertson, *A History of Freethought*, p. 667.

⁴⁰ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 646–48.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

It is impossible . . . to imagine with what eagerness and pleasure I read through the whole four volumes of this whimsical, sensible, pleasing work . . . and I know not of any work more proper to be put into the hands of a poor ignorant bigotted superstitious methodist. (*M.*, p. 261)

The Life of John Bunce Esq is an extraordinary book. It follows the travels of the eponymous hero as he seeks fortune and knowledge in the world. He seems to encounter both in a series of brilliant but short-lived marriages. Each marriage brings Bunce a brief pastoral idyll during which he discourses on the particular gifts of the wife of the moment. In this way Amory covers subjects as diverse as anatomy, pre-Babel language, the nature of phlogiston, theories of tides and earthquakes, and mathematical fluxions. All the women Bunce marries are staunchly Unitarian, as was the author. William Hazlitt described the book as 'one of the most singular productions in the language', continuing:

It is a Unitarian romance; and one in which the soul and body are equally attended to. The hero is a great philosopher, mathematician, anatomist, chemist, philologist, and divine, with a good appetite, the best spirits, and an amorous constitution, who sets out on a series of strange adventures to propagate his philosophy, his divinity, and his species, and meets with a constant succession of accomplished females, adorned with equal beauty, wit, and virtue, who are always ready to discuss all kinds of theoretical and practical points with him.⁴²

The *Monthly Review* declared that 'readers of every class will find something for their amusement'.⁴³

Unitarianism or Socinianism was born of the teachings of Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), who had fled Italy and settled in Poland. It rejected all Christian mysteries which were not subject to reason. Bunce's voracious search for knowledge and wisdom is not simply evidence of a good education but represents his search for true religion. Amory warns of the consequences of ignoring the 'book of nature' in his account of a conversation between two men, Clemens and

⁴² William Hazlitt, 'The Round Table: No.20. Sunday September 17, 1815', *The Examiner*, 17 September 1815.

⁴³ *The Monthly Review*, 35 (1766), 33–43 (p. 34).

Vigilus, in the *Theological Repository*. Clemens is wedded to revelation and ignores the 'book of nature' or 'that volume which the bounteous hand of God has opened to him' and so lays himself open to superstition.⁴⁴ Israel observes that through such beliefs 'Socinianism in significant ways lent added impetus and many new recruits to all wings of the Enlightenment.'⁴⁵ One of these new recruits was James Lackington.

There is much in *John Buncle* that would have appealed to Lackington. The novel is filled with echoes of the Stoicism that Lackington had consumed so vigorously in his youth. For example the narrator sets reason at the heart of his religion. His rejection of the mystery of the Trinity, as expounded in the Athanasian Creed, is based on its being contrary to Reason.⁴⁶ Miss Spense, a Christian Deist and mathematician, declares that a 'fundamental cause of moral error, is the prejudice and prepossession of a wrong education.'⁴⁷ Again, the narrator observes:

The voice of reason declares, that we ought to employ our abilities and opportunities in improving our minds to an extensive knowledge of nature in the sciences; and by diligent meditation and observation, acquire that prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, which should constantly govern our lives.⁴⁸

Lackington tells us that he was given *John Buncle* by 'Mr. R. T-nl-y' (C., p.4).⁴⁹ It is likely that this refers to Ralph Tinley, a 'worthy philosophical friend' (M., p. 403). Tinley was a shoemaker and keen entomologist who was a founding

⁴⁴ 'A Literary Memoir, Relative to a Future State, Evinc'd by the Light of Nature; – And To The Death of the Man Christ' in *Theological Repository* (London: J. Johnson, 1773), pp. 236–37.

⁴⁵ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. 121.

⁴⁶ Thomas Amory, *The Life of John Buncle Esq* (London: J. Noon, 1756), pp. 380–84.

⁴⁷ Amory, *The Life of John Buncle Esq*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, B Davenport, 1766), II, p. 313. This edition contains the second volume of Amory's novel.

⁴⁸ Amory, *The Life of John Buncle Esq* (1756), p.10.

⁴⁹ This evidence from *The Confessions* suggests that it was Tinley and not Dorcas, as suggested by Richard G. Landon, who introduced Lackington to *John Buncle*. See Landon, 'Small Profits Do Great Things: James Lackington and Eighteenth-Century Bookselling', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 5 (1976) 387–399.

member of The Society of Entomologists of London which met in the early 1780s at the Bank Eating House in Throgmorton Street twice a month.⁵⁰ He, Lackington and a few others seem to have met regularly in evening parties devoted to learning:

For some time several gentlemen spent two or three evenings in a week at my house, for the purpose of improvement in science. At these meetings we made the best use of our time with globes, telescopes, microscopes, electrical machines, air pumps, air guns, *A good bottle of wine, and other philosophical instruments* — (M., p. 403)

These regular meetings were more than simply a congenial means of socialising. In the light of Lackington's extended reading of the Stoics and *John Buncle*, coupled with his obvious application to learning, they are evidence of his wholehearted endorsement of the idea that the mysteries of the universe, or 'the book of nature', were not beyond the reach of mankind but could be understood through the power of reason and science. Newton's theories had been developed, as Israel writes, to build 'a highly integrated physio-theological system encompassing not only science, religion, and philosophy but also history, chronology, Bible criticism, and moral theory which became vastly influential throughout eighteenth-century Europe and America'.⁵¹ In the later editions of his *Memoirs*, we find further evidence of Lackington's interest in science. He refers to the work of Antoine van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723), a member of the Royal Society, who revealed a hitherto undiscovered world of micro-organisms. His observations of bacteria and blood cells 'by the help of the microscope' contributed to the understanding of the make-up of the human body. Lackington writes of the discovery 'in the skin' of '125,000 minute pores, or transpiring

⁵⁰ For further information about this and other early entomological societies, see Francis J. Griffin, 'The First Entomological Societies. An Early Chapter in Entomological History in England' in *Proceedings of the Royal Entomological Society of London*, 15 (1940) 49–68.

⁵¹ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. 203.

vessels, in a space small enough to be covered by a grain of sand' (*M.*, 1795, p. 107). He goes on to refer to the work of anatomist Lorenz Heister (1683–1758), whose surgical textbooks were filled with illustrations acquainting the reader with anatomy. 'Heister', writes Lackington, 'thinks that it is by the transpiring fluid, that fathers have sometimes felt pleasure in beholding their children when they did not know them' (*M.*, 1795, p. 107). In this way Lackington finds a rational, mechanistic, atomic explanation for the inexplicable emotion, love.

Conclusion

Lackington's 'enthusiasm' for free-thinking bursts forth in the language, references and the very tone of his *Memoirs*. His anti-Methodist stance recalls the anti-clericalism of earlier writers such as Collins, Tindal, and Chubb, all of whom he lists as having read. What emerges from a closer study of some of the texts and authors referred to by Lackington, is that he continued to read in a spirit of free-thinking, rationalist enquiry throughout his working life. He admired Voltaire and Hume, remained interested in the works of the Stoics and Epicureans, and was familiar with recent scientific discoveries. We may never know whether he had actually read Hume 'through' as Burke challenged, but he clearly did not shy away from the controversial essay 'On Suicide'.

It is difficult to calculate exactly where Lackington stood on the spectrum of radical and moderate Enlightenments defined by Israel. He applauds the French overthrow of an oppressive monarch whilst enjoying membership of an organisation, the Honourable Artillery Company, which took pride in its special status offering protection to, and being answerable to, the King rather than

Parliament. The language of Lackington's salute to revolution in France, however, suggests the spirit of Voltairian *Anglicisme*:

Like Briton [sic], they have caught the spark of freedom, and nobly emancipated themselves from a state of abject and degrading slavery, to a distinguished and honourable rank among nations. Long as time shall last, may they, with us, enjoy the blessing so gloriously obtained, with that due moderation which always properly distinguishes between *liberty* and *licentiousness*! (*M.*, 1792, p. 444)

This seems to situate Lackington within the mainstream, moderate Enlightenment.

These sentiments could even be used to describe his own position, empowered by reason and by reading to emancipate himself from poverty and from superstition.

The next chapter examines how he used reading to define this emancipated self.

Chapter Four

READING AND SELF-FASHIONING

As a young man Lackington's reading was limited by his budget and by the prescriptions of Methodism. Once he had breached these confines, by embracing free-thought and gaining access to job lots of books in his trade as a bookseller, Lackington threw himself into the task of educating himself through reading. As we have seen, he began by reading religious controversialists, then free-thinking writers. Next he further broadened his reading:

I have . . . read most of our English poets, and the best translations of the Greek and Latin Classics, and also of the Italian and French poets; nor did I omit to read History, Voyages, Travels, Natural History, Biography, &c . . . Another great source of amusement as well as knowledge, I have met with in reading almost all the best novels. (*M.*, pp. 398–401)

This chapter will investigate not simply what Lackington read as he widened the scope of his education, but how he used his reading to explore questions of identity. He could no longer define himself as a Methodist with a life ordained by and ordered in relation to God. Indeed, he criticises those who insisted that they were guided in their actions by promptings from heaven rather than the application of reason (*M.*, p. 285). Lackington gives a lengthy quotation from John Locke's reflections on 'enthusiasts' in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) to support his criticism of his former Methodist friends. Quoting Locke, he draws attention to the dangers of deceiving oneself by allowing a 'strong conceit' to overpower common sense, reason, and the 'check

of reflection', warning that this conceit is often mistaken for 'a divine authority, in concurrence with our own temper and inclination'.¹

The passage Lackington quotes can be found in at least one other source apart from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* so we cannot know if he had read Locke in part or in full. However, it is likely that he was familiar with contemporary understanding of the development of the mind, based upon Locke's proposition that humans are not born with innate ideas (whether planted by God or any other source), rather their minds resemble 'white paper void of all characters'.² It was through experience that ideas were formed and these, in turn, developed into knowledge through the action of reason and understanding.³ Locke's theories demand that individuals pay particular attention to the experiences that helped to shape their identities. It is perhaps not surprising that we find a preoccupation in the eighteenth century with ideas about the impact of education on personality, or, indeed, as Patricia Meyer Spacks observes, the emergence of 'spacious novels . . . offering the names of their central figures as titles . . . preoccupied with character and human identity.'⁴ One way that individuals could develop their minds was through reading and reflection and there is ample evidence in the *Memoirs* that this is just what Lackington set out to do.

¹ See Lackington's reference to Locke, *M*, pp. 285–6. This comes originally from Chapter XIX 'Of Enthusiasm' in Book IV of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, although it is possible that Lackington might have read it in Franz Swediauer's *The Philosophical Dictionary: Or Opinions Of Modern Philosophers On Metaphysical, Moral Or Political Subjects* (1786) where it appears on page 266.

² John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 1997) p. 109.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴ See for example works such as Lord Chesterfields *Letters*, John Gregory's *A Father's Letters to His Daughters* or Rousseau's *Emile*. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 1.

In his *Essay*, Locke warns of the dangers of trying to force links between disconnected ideas through a wrong association. In order to help to prevent this, he advocated a new method of organising commonplace books to store and sort knowledge and designed an index in order to facilitate the ordering and retrieval of information. His thoughts on commonplace books, intended to allow individuals to control the ‘constant succession and flux of ideas’ which could disrupt the orderly operation of the mind, were first published in French in Jean Le Clerc’s *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* (1686) and appeared under Locke’s name in 1705.⁵ Lucia Dacombe traces the influence of this method of commonplacing in the eighteenth century, through works such as Isaac Watts’s *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741) and John Mason’s *Self Knowledge* (1745). She observes that both of these works gained popular appeal in an age in which self-improvement was valued.⁶

We know that Lackington claimed to have read Watts’s *The Improvement of the Mind* and this chapter will argue that he made use of just such a system of storage and retrieval for his own reading and that it was this which enabled him to include so many quotations in his *Memoirs*. He uses these quotations to fashion an identity as an enlightened man of taste rather than a misguided enthusiast. Indeed, we might look upon these fragments as a motley, as scraps and patches clothing the man, in much the same way as today ‘Facebook’ offers its subscribers the opportunity to assemble an identity for themselves through the accumulation of cultural signifiers. Lackington, like modern social media users, changed his ‘profile’ frequently, and this chapter will examine in detail the ways

⁵ Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706), pp. 94–95, quoted in Lucia Dacombe, ‘Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65 (2004), 603–625 (p. 616).

⁶ Lucia Dacombe, ‘Noting the Mind’, pp. 616–17.

in which the identity he projected was modified through the various editions of his *Memoirs* as he added new references.

Fashioning a Self

The term 'self-fashioning' is particularly associated with the work of Stephen Greenblatt, who observes that the verb 'to fashion' acquired a particular significance in the sixteenth century as 'a way of designating the forming of the self'.⁷ Greenblatt describes how individuals in this period, particularly socially ambitious ones, self-consciously worked to create identities for themselves in response to certain cultural codes and constraints. He examines the ways in which the writers he discusses negotiated a careful and complex relationship between an authority or ideal to which they submitted and the notion of an 'alien' or 'other' which they rejected. The very language they use displays tangible signs of their various acts of submission and rejection. By studying the works of his chosen writers, Greenblatt draws attention to a reflexive relationship between literature and society in which literature is both produced by and reinforces cultural controls. He calls the balance which he identifies between historical background, literary criticism and sociology a 'poetics of culture'.⁸

Greenblatt focuses his study on the work of sixteenth-century writers. The created 'selves' he examines are always at risk in the dangerous games of power being played out around them in a period dominated by enormously powerful monarchs, and the fates of Sir Thomas Wyatt, imprisoned in the Tower of London on treason charges, and Sir Thomas More, executed as a traitor, demonstrate just what was at stake in the process of Renaissance self-fashioning.

⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Initially, perhaps, Greenblatt's theory of self-fashioning appears anachronistic when considering the attempts at self-construction by a late eighteenth-century bookseller. Lackington was not required to balance submission to values decreed by an absolute monarch in relation to the threats of heresy or treachery. However, cultural and commercial imperatives exert enormous influence upon the self-portrait he presents in his *Memoirs*. Lackington displays evidence of the cultural capital he has garnered through his reading in order to demonstrate his enlightenment, and as tangible evidence of his rejection of ignorance. One could argue that, in so doing, Lackington falls victim to precisely the same effacement or partial loss of self that Greenblatt identifies when the power of authority threatens to eclipse the individual. Lackington creates and remodels a plastic 'self' to appeal to his readers and potential customers, but that very identity threatens to be swamped by the referents it employs in its formation.

Geoff Baldwin presents an alternative to Greenblatt's idea of the self as a performance enacted by Renaissance writers.⁹ Instead, he looks to Stoic ideas popularised in the translations of the works of Epictetus to suggest that a Stoic 'new humanist' self was born in that part of an individual which Stoic philosophy recommended should be held back from the public sphere as an anchor, a protection against the vicissitudes of fortune. He cites Montaigne, and particularly his *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (1580), as an example of this private 'self' reinforced by reasoned introspection against the assaults of a fickle world. It is tempting to apply this theory to the case of James Lackington who so admired Epictetus and quotes from *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* on more

⁹ Geoff Baldwin, 'Individual and Self in the Late Renaissance', *The Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), 341–64.

than one occasion.¹⁰ It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to reconcile this portrayal of constancy and privacy with Lackington's shifting values throughout his life and his habit of constantly re-writing his *Memoirs*. His *Memoirs* are explicitly promotional and implicitly seek approval of the reader in a way which reveals the performative aspect of the self contained within.

In his *Origins of the Individualist Self*, Michael Mascuch traces the history of the notion of individualism, which perceives each person as 'an end in himself, as his own telos'.¹¹ According to Mascuch, the individualist self is distinctive in occupying the role of both 'author' and 'character' of his or her own narrative, and whilst he or she may not be in control of the drama of their lives, they subscribe to an illusion of control. Mascuch recognises Lackington as one of the first examples of an ordinary person assuming this dual role and thereby demonstrating moral authority by taking control of the narrative of his own life. He argues that 'the ordinary individualist self emerged in London with the appearance of Lackington's unprecedented book, in the final decade of the eighteenth century.'¹² This is a large claim and one which relies upon dismissing the contributions of other contenders for this distinction such as publisher John Dunton whose extraordinary book, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705), recounts his life and provides a reflection on its course. J. Paul Hunter argues that Dunton's *Life and Errors* was 'probably the first autobiography in England to be

¹⁰ Lackington quotes from *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* on pages 82 and 407 of his *Memoirs*. He includes further quotations, some from classical writers such as Terence, Euripides, and Horace, from the works of Montaigne, *M*, pp. 36, 194, 407, 431 and 446.

¹¹ Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

at once I-centered and concerned primarily with events more secular than spiritual'.¹³

Mascuch describes Lackington as an 'eighteenth-century "embodiment" of political, economic, and spiritual individualism, almost to the letter' and refers to him as a '*homo economicus*'.¹⁴ This term, used by Ian Watt in his discussion of Defoe's *The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), was borrowed from economic theorists who have found Crusoe to be a particularly apt illustration of the individualistic, commercial motivations driving modern 'economic man'. It is a useful description of Lackington, a self-made and ambitious businessman. Mascuch, however, extends the similarities between Crusoe and Lackington, presenting the latter as a 'kind of castaway' who finds himself fending for himself on the streets of London.¹⁵ This is not strictly true. As we saw in Chapter 3, Lackington notes the help of various Methodist acquaintances in finding housing and work. Mascuch also claims that the *Memoirs* rarely acknowledges the affective ties of family, noting that Lackington fails to name his siblings or the 'considerable number of offspring' he 'would have had'.¹⁶ Lackington does not mention the younger siblings from whom he was separated at the age of fourteen but, as we have seen, he does speak warmly of the Bowdens who provided him with a stable home. He clearly valued the companionship and friendship of John Jones, and the support of his wife, Dorcas, whom he describes as a positive presence in his shop. He left no surviving children.

¹³ J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York and London: Norton, 1990), p. 103.

¹⁴ Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self*, p. 26. See also Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 63.

¹⁵ Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self*, p. 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–28.

Where Mascuch is right is in recognising Lackington as a man who deliberately and carefully took control over shaping his life and presenting it to the world. He observes that reading 'informed Lackington's self-identity as an author' and cites the many quotations in the *Memoirs* as evidence of this:

Lackington ornamented his prose with tags of verse either copied verbatim or rendered as doggerel; he drew haphazardly upon Herrick, Dryden, Middleton, Shakespeare, old ballads, Horace (in translation), Cowley, Butler, Rowe, Pomfret, Thomson, Pope, Daniel, Gray, Blair, Milton, Prior, Young, and Aaron Hill to adorn his work. The reader rarely finishes more than a page of the *Memoirs*, especially the second and later editions, without finding the trace of another writer besides Lackington there.¹⁷

However, Lackington's selection is not as haphazard as Mascuch suggests here and is in fact shaped by a keen awareness of cultural dictates. I would argue that Lackington's individualism and authority emerged and developed through his re-writing of his *Memoirs* as he began to assert more control over the fragments of the literary culture he so admired and which his business depended upon.

With every re-write of his *Memoirs*, Lackington added more quotations. These can be viewed as a primary source of evidence of his reading. He did not always give a reference for his quotations and not all the references he did give are accurate so it has been necessary to trace the origins of many of the excerpts of poetry and prose contained in his writing. Appendix B lists these fragments and suggests some alternative publications which Lackington may have consulted. The quotations are intimately linked with his display of 'self', since he used them to present himself as a well-read participant in the world of letters. He tells readers explicitly that he, and not some better informed shopman, priced and catalogued the books he sold, and that he had acquired the knowledge necessary for this task 'by dint of application' to his reading (*M.*, pp. 397–98). Lackington,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

however, was not living in a world where books were simply seen to impart useful knowledge. They were also thought to inspire readers to virtuous behaviour. William St Clair observes that it was widely believed that 'reading good literature' could make 'men and women morally good and socially content'.¹⁸ Lackington himself writes:

My thirst was, and still is so great for literature, that I could almost subscribe to the opinions of Herillus the philosopher, who placed in learning the sovereign good, and maintained that it was alone sufficient to make us wise and happy; others have said that "Learning is the mother of all virtue, and that vice is produced from ignorance." although that is not strictly true, yet I cannot help regretting the disadvantages I labor under by having been deprived of the benefits of an early education, as it is a loss that can scarcely be repaired, in any situation. (*M.*, p. 406)

This passage is adapted from the opening of Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Lackington follows Montaigne in casting some doubt on the belief that learning is the sole cause of virtue but concludes by regretting his lack of an early education. He goes on to allude to the Parable of the Sower (in Matthew 13. 1–9.), observing that the 'instructions that I received from men and books were often like the seeds sown among thorns, the cares of the world choaked them' (*M.*, p. 407). The quest for knowledge in this instance replaces the 'Word of God' from the Parable as the all-important 'seed' which must be nurtured in good fertile soil. Lackington clearly places great value on learning but, by the time he added this passage to the 1793 edition of his *Memoirs*, he is light-hearted in his borrowings from Montaigne and self-deprecating in tone. As this chapter later demonstrates, he displays considerably more self-confidence and freedom in expressing his reading self in this edition than in the first. His self-confidence is evident in the broad range of material included in later editions. In the first edition, as we shall see, Lackington selects quotations mainly from a

¹⁸ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 133.

body of literature which St Clair terms the old canon. He constructs the self he presents to readers and potential customers according to the prescriptions of polite society. Indeed these standards represent the 'authority' identified by Greenblatt in his theory of self-fashioning. As he re-wrote later editions of his *Memoirs*, Lackington still reflects the tastes of the old canon, but he introduces a more diverse selection of quotations. There is evidence that he consults a more personal repository of excerpts of his observations and reading than appears to have been the case in the first edition, possibly compiled in a commonplace book dedicated specifically to the purposes of self-improvement as directed by Locke, Watts and others.

The Commonplace Book and Self-Fashioning

Recent scholarship by Dacome and by David Allan has thrown light on the way that commonplace books aided self-development. Dacombe notes that 'the practice of compiling [commonplace books] crucially contributed to the self-fashioning of the courtier and orator as well as to the training and self-cultivation of the student and the learned.'¹⁹ These books date back to a tradition of mnemonic note-taking advocated by Greek and Roman authorities such as Aristotle and Quintilian. They had long been used to collect pithy examples of wisdom or 'sententiae' which could be used to lend weight to arguments, aid rhetoric and enhance writing. Dacombe argues that they acquired new significance when Locke drew attention to the way that the ideas received by any individual shaped his or her mind. As already discussed, Locke himself made innovations in the design of these books in order to improve their effectiveness in

¹⁹ Dacome, 'Noting the Mind', p. 610.

organising the material they contained. He introduced a system of indexing which allowed users to make full use of the space available and which encouraged commonplacers to focus on the way they ordered the contents.²⁰ Colclough observes that Locke's method encouraged readers to decide the most appropriate headings under which to note their entries and that 'these were now to emerge from their reading rather than dictate it.' Not only did this system place the reading choices of the individual at the heart of the organisational logic of the books, but readers were prompted to record the source of their transcriptions and note-taking, including publication details and page references.²¹ Thus, commonplace books became 'tools of orderly thinking and repositories of individualised memories' rather than 'storehouses of a stable body of knowledge'.²² They not only aided self-improvement, but were seen to foster self-discipline.

As David Allan observes, this literary tool could influence the taste and practices of the user. The commonplace book, in his definition, was a 'physical artefact with a prodigious capacity for shaping literary preferences and intellectual habits as well as for fulfilling the cultural and philosophical needs of an era of politeness and incipient Enlightenment'.²³ These books might contain 'facts and figures, anecdotes, news, opinions, judgements, paradoxes, puzzles and, above all, evidence of human thought and feelings'.²⁴ As such they provided

²⁰ According to Locke's method, information was entered under headings arranged alphabetically according to the first letter and the first vowel of the heading. It was noted in an index with a page number to enable the user to retrieve the information easily. See Dacombe, 'Noting the Mind', p. 610.

²¹ Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p. 33.

²² Dacombe, 'Noting the Mind', p. 612.

²³ David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

sites for the nurturing of the individualist self which could be shaped and stimulated by just such a habit of studied and noted reading.

Throughout his writing, we find Lackington using 'sententiae' – most commonly excerpts of poetry, and off-cuts of the Enlightenment values to which he aspired – to endorse his own assertions and support his mental processes. The *Memoirs* and *The Confessions* contain evidence which suggests that he stored excerpts of reading and cuttings for future use in some form of commonplace book. In *The Confessions*, for instance, Lackington describes how he made notes in an inter-leaved Bible:

I also procured a Bible interleaved with blank paper, and transcribed many of the remarks and objections of infidel writers to various texts; and opposite to some texts I even wrote my own objections. (C. p. 8)

This says something about the intensity of Lackington's commitment to the course of learning he had embarked on since interleaved Bibles, which interspersed pages of text with writing paper, were very expensive, usually costing well over a pound and occupying several volumes.²⁵ He clearly states that he 'transcribed' the writings of 'infidel writers', showing that he *copied* what he had read into the blank pages of his Bible. This passage also offers us evidence that Lackington ventured to commit to paper some of his own thoughts and responses to his reading – 'I even wrote my own objections'. This suggests that relatively early in his broader education, Lackington was developing a habit of noting and reflecting in writing on his reading.

His actions were not unusual. Bookselling catalogues offered numerous different interleaved books inviting written participation from the reader. These

²⁵ See Thomas Payne & Son's Catalogue for 1781, in which a two-volume Bible interleaved with writing paper costs 1l. 4s.; T. Smith & Son's Catalogue for 1780 which offers a five-volume Bible interleaved with writing paper for 1l. 11s. 6d; and William Collins's Catalogue for 1786 which offers a three-volume Bible interleaved with writing paper also for 1l. 11s. 6d.

books, which have not received much attention from historians of reading, were often aimed at scholars or those whose work required them to engage actively with canons of knowledge, and they include books one might expect to solicit notes such as medical textbooks, sermons, and catalogues of plants. Then there were books which were perhaps directed at socially ambitious readers. William Collins offered his customers a copy of his *English Barronetage* for annotation, and also 'Poole's English Parnassus'.²⁶ This last title, first published in 1656, is a poetic anthology, arranged under 'heads', fulfilling a function very similar to the commonplace book. It invited readers to contribute their own choice excerpts of poetry to those gathered by Joshua Poole, its editor.

Many of the quotations Lackington adds to his *Memoirs* display idiosyncrasies of transcription which might result from misremembering but could also be symptomatic of their having been copied using just such a process as Lackington describes for recording his thoughts on the Bible. Lackington is particularly free when quoting poetry. He alters pronouns to adapt lines to fit the sense of his narrative, omits lines and switches the order of couplets taken from longer poems.²⁷ One example of this can be found in his selection from Sneyd Davis's poetic epistle 'To Dr. Thomas Taylor':

"Hail, precious pages! that amuse and teach,
 "Exalt the genius, and improve the breast.
 "A feast for ages. – O thou banquet nice!
 "Where the soul riots with secure excess.
 "What heart felt bliss! What pleasure wing'd hours." (*M.*, p. 211)

²⁶ William Collins, *A Catalogue (for 1786)* (London: Collins, 1786), pp. 44 and 52.

²⁷ For examples of changes to pronouns or nouns, see *M.*, p. 433 where Lackington changes 'his' to 'my' in a quotation from Gardenstone; *M.*, p. 243 where he alters Anstey's *New Bath Guide* from 'Blessed I' to 'Blessed she'. He reorganises a quotation from Peter Pindar's *Brother Peter to Brother Tom*, *M.*, p. 158 to fit the context of his writing, changing 'The parson frank'd their souls to kingdom come' to 'Their souls was frank'd for. Kingdom come' [sic].

In this quotation, Lackington took the first two lines, from 'Hail, precious pages' to 'improve the breast', from a later section of the poem. The lines which follow in his quotation, from 'a feast for ages' to 'wing'd hours', occur some thirteen lines earlier in the original poem.²⁸ Lackington has united groups of lines which appealed to him from Davis's poem regardless of the original ordering and he does this to suit his own purposes.

There are many other instances of lines being omitted, the ordering of lines being switched and phrases joined from different sections of longer poems.²⁹ A notable example is the changes he makes in the order of lines quoted from Pomfret's *Reason* which introduces letter XXXVIII, a chapter which describes what he read in order to educate himself:

"Those who would learning's glorious kingdom find,
 "The dear-bought treasure of the trading mind,
 "From many dangers must themselves acquit,
 "And more than Scylla and Charybdis meet.
 "Oh! what an ocean must be voyaged o'er,
 "To gain a prospect of the shining store!
 "Resisting rocks oppose th'enquiring soul,
 "And adverse waves retard it as they roll.
 "The little knowledge now which man obtains,
 "From outward objects and from sense he gains;
 "He like a wretched slave must plod and sweat,
 "By day must toil, by night that toil repeat;
 "And yet, at last, what little fruit he gains,
 "A beggar's harvest glean'd with mighty pains!" (*M.*, p. 396)

The six lines from 'The little knowledge now which man obtains' to 'A beggar's harvest glean'd with might pains!' occur much earlier in Pomfret's poem than the

²⁸ See *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes*, 6 vols (London: Dodsley, 1782), VI, pp. 162 and 161.

²⁹ For examples of lines omitted see quotations in *Memoirs* from works by William Somervile, p. 114; Pope, p. 531; James De La Cour, p. 367; Rev. R. Nares, p. 425; and Young, pp. 261 and 433.

eight lines Lackington uses to open his quotation.³⁰ Lackington adapts this poem to describe his own situation. Pomfret writes despairingly of how difficult it is, when seeking truth, to disentangle reason from human passions and preconceptions. His is a disheartened response to Locke's ideas of the 'tabula rasa' and the association of ideas. Lackington, however, extracts a total of fourteen lines to describe how hard he worked to educate himself. He includes none of Pomfret's anxiety about sources of knowledge which might obscure truth. In Lackington's version, knowledge is not the 'dear bought *purchase* of the *training* mind' as Pomfret writes, but the 'dear-bought *treasure* of the *trading* mind'.³¹ Lackington does not 'gain a prospect of the shining shore', as described by Pomfret, but introduces the rich stocks of books he sells into the metaphor by changing the end of this line to refer to this repository of knowledge as a 'shining store'.³² He deftly alters Pomfret's poem to reflect upon his own efforts as a merchant to improve his mind. He represents his shop, a garner of learning, as the goal of his efforts as well as the means of achieving his 'little knowledge', the 'treasure' he values so greatly.

Lackington tells readers that as a young man he 'could almost repeat by memory' Pomfret's poems, so it is possible that he wrote this quotation from memory (*M.*, p. 151). It seems to display, however, a more calculated intervention than memorisation involves. Lackington sets down first those lines, doctored to refer to his endeavours, which speak of the heroic efforts of those seeking learning who, like Odysseus or Jason, face twin dangers in their quests, represented in mythology by the monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis. He

³⁰ John Pomfret, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Cook, 1736). The first eight lines of Lackington's version can be found on page 135 of this volume, the final lines can be found on page 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³² *Ibid.*

then reinforces this by including lines which describe the hard labour involved in the search for knowledge.

Lackington gleans what he requires from the writings of others, adapting it with all the confidence of ownership. Pomfret's lines appear to have been deliberately crafted into this sonnet-like structure from two discrete sections of the longer poem. These examples of Lackington's alteration of the works of other poets suggest that he used some means of noting his reading before he included it in his *Memoirs*. His ability to select lines of poetry on just about any subject which arises in his account of his life similarly suggests that at least some of the quotations he wove into his autobiographies could have been stored for just such an occasion to help justify and construct his self-portrait.

Allan records a huge range of information stored in the various notebooks and commonplace books of the period which he studied. He writes that 'the anecdote, equally epigrammatic and revolving once again around pithy observations made in revealing circumstances, was yet another important quarry for commonplacers'. He cites the example of a commonplace book kept by the politician Richard Neville entitled 'Common Place Book, and occasion¹ Anecdotes Resp^e diff^t Persons & - begun Dec^r 3^d. 1769'.³³ Lackington, too, appears to have stored numerous strange anecdotes concerning Methodists which force one to ask whether he had been collecting these incidents over a number of years as a stick with which to beat his former co-religionists. For example, he refers to a note in a shop window – "Rumps and Burs sold here, and Baked Sheep's heads will be continued every night, *if the Lord permit*" – and another notice which he 'saw in a village near Plymouth in Devonshire, "Roger Tuttel, by

³³ Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England*, p. 76.

God's grace and mercy, kills rats, moles, and all sorts of vermin and venomous creatures''' (M., pp. 295–96). He also seems to have stored printed ephemera such as handbills, newspaper articles and reviews.

By the end of the eighteenth century the practice of commonplacing had been adapted and absorbed into print culture. As discussed in the previous chapter, one source of the quotation Lackington took from Locke may have been Franz Swediauer's compilation *The Philosophical Dictionary*, which was described as 'a Common-place Book for private use'. It assembled philosophical excerpts under headings for 'the amusement of travellers' who could not carry many books and to 'satisfy the curiosity of those who cannot purchase many books'.³⁴

Numerous similar dictionaries offering extracts of poetry were published throughout the eighteenth century. These promised to improve the minds and morals of their readers by 'conveying instruction in the most effectual manner, by the vehicle of pleasure', or inspiring 'sentiments of wisdom, virtue, and benevolence'.³⁵ Charles Dilly suggests that mercantile classes 'at least of the higher order' might fill their leisure with 'pleasures of polite literature' from his collection, *Elegant Extracts*. Should anyone doubt the benefits of indulging in polite literature, or acquiring good taste and judgement, Edward Bysshe (who styles himself 'Gent' on the title page of *The Art of English Poetry*) spells out the qualities embodied in his patron who is just such a 'good Judge of Poetry':

Such a Man must be of an elevated Mind, founded on a great Compass of Knowledge, on a generous Education, on reading of the best Authors, and on a Conversation with Men of the first Rank and Fortunes: All which must concur to give him that Readiness and

³⁴ Franz Sweidauer, *The Philosophical Dictionary*, 4 vols (London: GGJ and J Robinson, 1786), 1, Preface.

³⁵ Charles Dilly, *Elegant Extracts* (London: Charles Dilly, 1784), p. i.; and Rev. John Adams, *The English Parnassus* (London: Kearsley, 1789), A3.

Clearness of Apprehension, that Fine and Just Taste of what is Natural and Great, that Elegance and Depth of Thought; in a Word, that Happy Turn of Soul and Race of Judgement, which distinguish him from the Vulgar in every thing he Speaks and Acts.³⁶

There is clearly an element of flattery here but this passage does illustrate the qualities associated in this period with good literary taste. Lackington's emphasis in his *Memoirs* that he read the 'best' examples of poetry and the 'best novels' suggests that he may have heeded Bysshe's description.

We know that Lackington came across at least one example of an attempt to put into print the notes, poetry and commonplace collections of a literary enthusiast who was lauded as 'the patron of industry and virtue'.³⁷ In 1791 J. Robertson published an anonymous volume, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. This represented a condensation of a library created in Laurencekirk in Scotland by Francis Garden, Lord Gardenstone (1721–1793). Gardenstone, a judge, was ennobled when he was made a Lord of Session in 1764. He never married and used his wealth to build a model village on his estate in Laurencekirk offering housing, employment, and an inn that contained a library 'for the amusement of Travellers'.³⁸ One commentator noted that the estate was 'improved, enlarged, enriched, happily regulated as to its police [government] by his efforts to a degree highly honourable at once to his Lordship's bounty, and to the enlightened intelligence with which that bounty was exerted'.³⁹ In 1792 another edition of the

³⁶ Edward Bysshe, *The Art of English Poetry* (London: R. Knaplock, E. Castle, B. Tooke, 1702), dedication.

³⁷ Henry Skrine, *Three Successive Tours of the North of England and Great Part of Scotland* (London: Bulmer, 1795), p. 112.

³⁸ Lord Gardenstone, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (Edinburgh: J. Robertson, 1792), preface. See also G.F.R. Barker, rev. Anita McConnell, 'Garden Francis, Lord Gardenstone (1721–1793)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10349>, [accessed 9 August 2013]

³⁹ Robert Heron, *Scotland Described* (Edinburgh: John Moir, 1799), p. 217. Heron uses the word 'police' here to mean 'the regulation and government of a city or country, so far as regards the inhabitants', see Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, 1756), II, n.p.

Miscellanies in Prose and Verse was published which attributed the collection to the library of Lord Gardenstone.

Lackington quoted extensively from this book, which suggests that he was familiar with it and had read it since many of the poems are not to be found in other sources.⁴⁰ Gardenstone, who like Lackington had risen socially largely through his own efforts, provided his readers with a display of his learning. He included a number of poems which he had written, some based on classical writers and particularly Horace. Gardenstone's critical observations on plays, novels and poetry, taken from 'the margins of the respective books', were added to the book.⁴¹ From these, we learn that he enjoyed the novels of Smollett but found Young's *Night Thoughts* 'woeful'.⁴² He also commented on English historians and wrote a brief 'Memoir of the Life, Character and Writings of George Buchanan', the sixteenth-century Scottish poet, whom he admired. The *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* represents a portrait of the reading and literary life of Lord Gardenstone, one which may very well have inspired Lackington to add more evidence of his own reading to later editions of his *Memoirs*. Gardenstone's *Miscellanies* is highly personal, cataloguing as it does his responses to literary culture. The social and philanthropic endeavours of this man were reflected in his estate and the village he built. Gardenstone's intellectual aspirations are memorialised in the extraordinary volume of opinion, composition and miscellaneous writings he collected. This collection was praised for showing 'evident marks of acute critical observation, an acquaintance with the best

⁴⁰ For quotations from Gardenstone's *Miscellanies*, see *M.*, pp. xxiv, 32, 42, 77, 99, 169, 214, 174, 360, 399, 432, 433, 448, 498, 501, and 502. See also the title page of the seventh edition.

⁴¹ Gardenstone, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, preface.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 194 and 157.

authors, and a happy classical talent for composition, both in Prose and Verse.⁴³

Nearly a hundred years after Bysshe had written his dedicatory piece in *The Art of English Poetry*, one still finds value placed in reading 'the best authors'.

Gardenstone's example raises the question of how Lackington fashioned a memorialised individualist self in *Memoirs*. The sheer number of quotations he provides illustrates the way he used his reading to enhance writing and rhetoric, as indeed, it had been employed for centuries. Lackington endorses statements about his life by referring to the writing of authors he admired. For example, when he describes his return to Wellington near the end of the book, he inserts lines from Samuel Rogers's popular Romantic reflection on the village of his boyhood, 'The Pleasures of Memory' (1792) (*M.*, p. 500). Sometimes it appears as though his prose is influenced by lines of poetry that he had it in mind to add. We see an example of this quite early in the *Memoirs*. Lackington describes the reaction of villagers to his decision to leap from his bedroom window to attend a Methodist meeting after he has been locked in his room by Mary Bowden. He uses lines from James Beattie's account of the education and development of the poet Edwin, 'The Minstrel: or the Progress of Genius' (1771). He identifies himself with the minstrel of the title showing that his neighbours had very different thoughts about his own antics, just as opinions about Edwin were divided:

Some few admired my amazing strength of faith, but the major part pitied me, as a poor ignorant, deluded and infatuated boy.

"The neighbours star'd and sigh'd yet bless'd the lad,
"Some deem'd him wond'rous wise, some believ'd him mad.

DR. BEATTIE. (*M.*, pp. 104-5)

⁴³ *The Pocket Repository of Instruction and Entertainment Selected from New Publications* (Perth: R. Manson, 1795), p. 247.

Quotations such as this suggest that Lackington may be claiming some affinity to the developing figure of the untutored Romantic artist.

Lackington views his life, and reflects on his trials and endeavours, through the prism of his reading which represents and embodies the enlightenment values to which he subscribes. Bruce Hindmarsh has described the *Memoirs* as an 'unconversion narrative' in which Lackington appropriates the form of the traditional conversion story to describe his falling away from faith.⁴⁴ The *Memoirs* deals with Lackington's conversion to Methodism light-heartedly and suggests that his true conversion comes later. Instead of portraying the subject moving from a state of ignorance of God's love, through a process of trials and doubt, to knowledge of saving grace, the *Memoirs* replaces 'grace' with Lackington's acceptance of reason and his participation in a culture of education and Enlightenment. Whilst there are many of examples of biblical references embedded in the text, it is poetry and philosophy which Lackington exalts as the justification for his enlightenment beliefs. I have found that the only exception to his habit of supporting his writing with quotations comes in those pages of his autobiography which deal with his business objectives.⁴⁵ This seems to indicate that Lackington was confident in his own commercial instincts and saw no need to refer to any other authority. We see a different kind of confidence developing in later editions of the *Memoirs* as he moved away from a selection of mainly canonical writers to fashion his self for the reader. I will now look at the ways in which the 'individualist self' fashioned by Lackington changed through the various editions of his *Memoirs*.

⁴⁴ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 340–42.

⁴⁵ For example, see *M.*, pp. 354–359 which describe Lackington's business dealings with Denis and 362–366 which give an account of his decision not to give credit. These pages contain very few, if any, quotations.

First Edition: Fashioning a Self from Canonical Writing

Lackington included roughly one hundred and fifty quotations within the three hundred and forty-four pages of the first edition of his *Memoirs*. He mainly selected excerpts of poems and plays written by writers St Clair classes as belonging to the 'old canon' of literature. These include lines by Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Dryden, Pope, Thomson and Young.⁴⁶ He included several extracts from Samuel Butler's poem *Hudibras*, lines from his childhood favourite, John Pomfret (1667–1702), as well as passages by John Gay (1685–1732), Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), Aaron Hill (1685–1750), Matthew Prior (1664–1721), Nathaniel Cotton (1705–1788) and others. There are several extracts taken from seventeenth century plays by writers such as Francis Beaumont (1584–1616) and John Fletcher (1579–1625), Ben Jonson (1573–1637), and Thomas Middleton (d. 1627). We find works by Voltaire translated by Tobias Smollett (1721–1777) and Thomas Francklin (1721–1784), passages from Horace translated by Philip Francis (1708–1773), and excerpts from Virgil, translated by Dryden. The selection tends to draw upon popular, canonical works.

At least twenty-four quotations in the first edition can be found in poetic miscellanies such as Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry* (1702), Thomas Hayward's *The British Muse* (1738), and an anonymous collection, *A Poetical Dictionary* (1761), which borrows much of its selection from these.⁴⁷ A. Dwight Culler has studied these compendia of poetic fragments and has traced their evolution. The first, and 'the model of all those that followed, was the

⁴⁶ St Clair lists those authors whose works tended to be re-issued by London publishers before 1774 as 'Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Dryden, Pope, Prior, Thomson, and Young'. See *The Reading Nation In The Romantic Period*, p. 123.

⁴⁷ See Appendix B where I indicate quotations which are found in these reference books.

"And few there be who're are [sic] always fortunate.

"One gains by what another is bereft:

"The frugal destinies have only left

"A common bank of happiness below,

"Maintain'd, like nature, by an ebb and flow."

How's Indian Emp. (*M.*, 1791, p. 316)

The first passage is from Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*, XI, lines 556–

9. The second passage merges six lines from 'Out of the Italian by Fulvio Testi' with six lines from *The Indian Queen*, a play which Dryden wrote with Sir Robert Howard.⁵⁰ This amalgamation can be found in *The Art of English Poetry* under the heading 'Vicissitude'.⁵¹ The other passage he uses, from Dryden's Virgil, appears under the same heading in Bysshe's collection making it a likely source for Lackington's quotations.⁵²

This does not appear to have been the only such miscellany used by Lackington. Letter XXXIX, in which he records his thoughts on women observed whilst travelling, opens with an epigraph which Lackington credits to 'Milton's Samson's [sic] Agonistes':

"Set *Woman* in his eye, and in his walk,

"Among daughters of men the fairest found,

"Many are in each region passing fair

"As the noon sky, more like to goddesses,

"Than mortal creatures; graceful and discreet,

"Expert in amorous arts, enchanting tongues:

⁵⁰ The lines 'New turns and changes ev'ry Day' to 'The wise man little joy or sorrow shows' are taken from 'Out of the Italian of Fulvio Testi to Count Montecucculi' and can be found in *Examen Poeticum* (London: Tonson, 1706), p. 72. The lines 'For over all there hangs a doubtful fate' to 'Maintain'd, like nature, by an ebb and flow' are taken from *The Indian Queen* – Lackington changes 'Since' to 'For'. See for example Dryden and Howard, *The Indian Queen* (London: Tonson, 1735), p. 185. I have found only two examples of these lines being linked in this way. The merger can be found as a quotation in *The Unfortunate Concubines* where it appears with a further couplet from Dryden's 'Palamon and Arcite' tacked onto the end. See *The Unfortunate Concubines: The History of Fair Rosamond Mistress to Henry II and Jane Shore Concubine to Edward IV Kings of England* (London: R. Ware, C. Hitch, J. Hodges, 1748), p. 146.

⁵¹ Edward Bysshe, *The Art of English Poetry* (London: R. Knapton, E. Castle, B. Tooke, 1702), p. 360.

⁵² We find another example of two passages found under the same heading, 'Content' in *The Art of English Poetry*, which are used by Lackington on page 98 of the first edition of his *Memoirs*. Again, both are by Dryden.

"Persuasive, virgin majesty, with mild
 "And sweet allay'd, yet terrible to approach;
 "Skill'd to retire, and in retiring, draw
 "Hearts after them, tangl'd in amorous nets;
 Such objects have the power to soften and tame
 "Severest temper, smooth the rugged'st brow,
 Enerve and with voluptuous hope dissolve;
 Draw out with credulous desire,
 At will, the manliest resolute breast." (M., 1791, p. 309)

The quotation actually comes from Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Book II but it is similarly wrongly attributed to 'Milton's Samp. Agonistes' in *A Poetical Dictionary*, and to 'MILTON's Sampson Agonistes' in *The Beauties of English Drama*, which evolved from the earlier work.⁵³ One of these two collections, rather than an edition of Milton, seems certain to have been the source for this quotation.

Lackington's use of such reference books explains the somewhat old-fashioned nature of the quotations he used in the first edition of *Memoirs*. It appears that rather than referring to his own personal sources of poetic extracts, he relied heavily upon these printed resources. Culler has broken down the quotations gathered by Bysshe. He found that:

In the first form it consisted of 1,452 quotations from forty-eight different authors; in the second, which is nearly half again as large, of 2,123; and in the third and fourth revisions of 2,517 and 2,693 respectively. In this last form the authors represented are Dryden (1,201 quotations), Pope (155), Cowley (143), Butler (140), Otway (127), Blackmore (125), Shakespeare (118), Milton (117), Rowe (116), Lee (104), Garth (59), Waller (44), and a number of minor Restoration poets.⁵⁴

If we compare this to the authors more frequently quoted by Lackington in the first edition of *Memoirs*, we find that he included twelve quotations from Dryden,

⁵³ *A Poetical Dictionary*, 4 vols (London: J. Newbery, J. Richardson, and others, 1761), IV, p. 249; and *The Beauties of English Drama* 4 vols (London: G. Robinson, 1777), IV, p. 210.

⁵⁴ Culler, 'Edward Bysshe and the Poet's Handbook', p. 868.

sixteen from Butler, five from Shakespeare, seven from Pope, twelve from Young, as well as several from Blair and Pomfret.

The Art of English Poetry is explicitly didactic, offering the reader 'Rules for Making Verses', and 'A Dictionary of Rhymes' as well as 'A Collection of the Most Natural, Agreeable, and Noble Thoughts, . . . that are to be found in the best English Poets'.⁵⁵ As Barbara Benedict observes, this work directed readers in aesthetic standards as well as guiding them in how and what to read.⁵⁶ She sees such commonplace collections as being designed to make poetry accessible to a widening audience, promising gentility and social power to readers. More importantly 'they mark the transformation of this power into a literate skill that can be learned.'⁵⁷ Lackington did not simply absorb these lessons; rather, by applying the very embodiment of polite literature to his *Memoirs*, he fashioned his self-portrait according to its standards.

Lackington also implicitly subscribed to the moral values contained in these volumes. St Clair writes that the old canon poets wrote about themes and values that were to be promoted – 'love of God, moral lessons, family love and affection, elegies for the dead'.⁵⁸ Bysshe made his selections with a declared moral agenda, promising truth as well as good writing: 'no Thought can be justly said to be fine, unless it be true, I have all along had a regard for Truth.'⁵⁹ The Reverend John Adams stated that his collection would 'improve the taste of the young Reader . . . [and] inspire sentiments of wisdom, virtue, and benevolence'.⁶⁰ Thomas Janes, meanwhile, chose poetry 'to instil into the mind of the reader, the love of virtue,

⁵⁵ Bysshe, *The Art of English Poetry*, title page.

⁵⁶ Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 152.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵⁸ St Clair, *The Reading Nation In The Romantic Period*, p. 133.

⁵⁹ Bysshe, *The Art of English Poetry*, preface.

⁶⁰ Rev. John Adams, *The English Parnassus* (London: Kearsley, 1789), p. Advertisement.

and true religion'.⁶¹ As Benedict points out, these miscellanies represent a nexus of stylistic, moral and commercial values. They do not simply present 'beauties' of literary culture and worthy sentiments to be imbibed by readers but contribute to the commodification of literature.⁶²

The writers Lackington refers to in the first edition of his *Memoirs* were some of the most lucrative to booksellers and the rights owners. The copyright to most work written in English had been held by London publishers, who guarded their property jealously, but Irish, Scottish and overseas printers recognised an opportunity to exploit the growing demand for books by producing reprints of popular works. Between 1765 and 1776 the Foulis brothers of Glasgow reprinted the works of playwrights such as Addison, Congreve, Dryden, Gay, Rowe and Shakespeare and poets including Butler, Milton, Pomfret, Pope, Prior, Waller and Young. Thomas F. Bonnell credits the brothers with helping to launch what was to become a highly competitive market for classic series of literature during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁶³ William Creech, John Bell and others followed their example. The tight hold by a small group of London rights owners over the English canon was eased by a decision in the House of Lords to end perpetual copyright in a landmark ruling in the 1774 case of *Donaldson v. Becket*. St Clair sees this decision as contributing to an explosion of anthologising,

⁶¹ Thomas Janes, *The Beauties of the Poets* (London: Henry Fry, 1788), p. iii.

⁶² Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader*, p. 173.

⁶³ Thomas F. Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry 1765–1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 56. Bonnell lists the English poets reprinted by the Foulis brothers as: Milton; Pope; Shenstone; Butler; Glover; Prior; Thomson; Dryden; Young; Addison; Collins; Gay; Waller; Akenside; Denham; Garth; Gray; Lyttleton; Parnell; Mason; Richardson; Swift. He compares this with other series such as that of John Bell which included: Milton; Pope; Dryden; Butler; Prior; Thomson; Gay; Waller; Young; Cowley; Spenser; Parnell; Congreve; Swift; Addison; Shenstone; Churchill; Pomfret; Donne; Garth; Denham; Hughes; Fenton; Dyer; Lansdown; Buckingham; Savage; Roscommon; Mallet; Somerville; Cunningham; Broome; King; Rowe; Tickell; Akenside; Lyttleton; G. West; J. Philips; A. Philips; Moore; Armstrong-Smith; Watts; Pitt; Gray; Chaucer. In both lists one finds those writers most favoured by Lackington in his first edition of *Memoirs*.

abridging and re-printing of the old canon. This was the moment when literature in the form of these out-of-copyright poets entered the classroom in schoolbooks, 'instructors', 'monitors' and 'readers'.⁶⁴

We see therefore, in the first edition of *Memoirs*, an attempt by Lackington to present himself as an enthusiastic participant in literary culture. By consciously seeking just the right 'bons mots' from reference books designed to aid the aspiring writer and the aspiring gentleman, Lackington signals his conformity to the values of polite society embedded in and disseminated through the poetic canon. By displaying his reading as evidence of his membership of a literate middle class, he also promotes reading as a means of social advancement – a point I will return to in the next chapter. The first edition of *Memoirs* illustrates clearly the ways in which Lackington's self-fashioning is performed in relation to the imperatives of a culture in which literary, moral and commercial values were closely allied.

The 1792-1794 Editions: Broadening the Field of Cultural Referents and the Emergence of Lackington's Individualist Self

Lackington added considerably to the second edition (1792) and continued to expand his autobiography with even more quotations in the 1793 edition which was reprinted twice in 1794 with an index. As discussed in chapter 1 this brings the total number of known 'editions' of *Memoirs* to five but does not resolve the mystery of the missing 'sixth' edition.⁶⁵ This 1794 edition contains over two hundred and fifty quotations more than the first edition and was expanded from around three hundred and fifty to more than five hundred pages.

⁶⁴ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, pp. 135–7.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1, p. 37–8 for details of the various different editions.

It might be that Lackington's confidence was buoyed by good reviews and he decided to broaden the range of writers from whom he quoted, or, as I have suggested, that he read the 1791 edition of Gardenstone's as yet anonymous *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* and decided to add a more personal reflection of his own reading to later editions of his *Memoirs*. What is certain is that Lackington moved beyond the safe confines of the old canon when he added quotations to later editions. He did not abandon these popular writers, adding more than ten further extracts from poems by Pope, and more from Butler, Dryden, Shakespeare and Young. Alongside these, he quoted from Mark Akenside (1721–1770), Christopher Anstey (1724–1805), James Beattie (1735–1803), John Bidlake (1755–1814), Ralph Broome (d. 1805), Edmund Cartright (1743–1823), Charles Churchill (1732–1764), Sneyd Davis (1709–1769), James Hurdis (1763–1801), Soame Jenyns (1704–1787), 'Peter Pindar' or John Wolcot (1738–1819), Samuel Rogers (1763–1855) and James Smith (1775–1839), amongst others. We find excerpts from the writing of women such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), Anne Yearsley (1753–1806) and Helen Maria Williams (1761–1827). Lackington's quotations are more diverse with more contemporary references than the first edition. As suggested earlier, some quotations show evidence of having been gathered from a personal record of his reading such as a commonplace book. Others offer an insight into books he may have been reading at the time of writing.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Lackington redoubled his attack on the Methodists in later editions of his *Memoirs*, adding quotations from Evan Lloyd's 'The Methodist' to the considerable body of quotations from Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*. Lackington clearly enjoyed satirical verse, for the later editions

abound with it. He includes ten quotations from works by John Wolcot who wrote under the pseudonym 'Peter Pindar' and whose satirical verse was highly popular at the end of the eighteenth century. Another best-selling work was Christopher Anstey's *The New Bath Guide* (1766) which satirised fashionable Bath life through the eyes of the rustic Simpkin in verse letters to his mother.⁶⁶ Lackington seems to have particularly enjoyed the verse letter of another Simpkin in Ralph Broome's *Letters from Simkin the Second to his Dear Brother In Wales Containing an Humble Description of the Trial of Warren Hastings Esq* (1788). This work, which imitates features of Anstey's anapaestic verses, describes the intricacies of the Hastings Trial and focuses its satiric attack on Edmund Burke who had initiated the impeachment of Hastings in his *Article of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanours* (1786). The poem went through eleven editions between 1788 and 1796 and was particularly topical in 1793 when opinions of Burke, who had recently launched his attack on the French Revolution, were polarised. The nine quotations from this work suggest that it was a book Lackington was familiar with, and may even have been reading as he made alterations to his *Memoirs*.

All the later editions of *Memoirs* reveal evidence of a more inclusive approach by Lackington to the kinds of fragments of literary culture he inserted. We find excerpts of comic songs from the exuberant comedy *Wild Oats* (1791) by John O'Keefe (1747–1833), passages from Peter Pindar's caustic satirical verses on monarchy, *The Right of Kings or Loyal Odes to Disloyal Academicians* (1791), an extract from Antoine-Joseph Pernety's prose account, *The History of a Voyage*

⁶⁶ *The New Bath Guide* went through more than thirty editions between 1766 and 1800 and spawned many imitations, such as Samuel Hoole's *Modern Manner* (1781) which satirised fashionable London life and *The India Guide* (1786?) which turned its attention to Anglo-Indian society. See Martin S. Day, 'Anstey and Anapaestic Satire in the Late Eighteenth Century', *ELH*, 15 (1948), 122–146 (p. 131).

to the *Malouine (or Falkland) Islands Made in 1763 and 1764* (1771), and from another example of travel writing, Philip Thicknesse's *A Year's Journey through the Pais Bas* (1786). Lackington, like Gardenstone, adds examples of his own compositions, contributing extracts from an Epitaph and a Prayer as well as lines he had written whilst working for Mr Taylor and a composition written 'but a few days since', an epigram on 'an ignorant Methodist preacher' (*M.*, p. 177). Lackington adds further translations of classical writers such as Hesiod and Horace, thus blending genres and high and low culture in a mixture which is peculiarly his own.

He acknowledges one passage found in *The Monthly Review*, specifying the year, 1788, and the page number, 'page 286' (*M.*, p. 293). We know that Lackington continued to read the *Monthly Review* even after he retired and moved to the country.⁶⁷ This review journal, edited and printed by Ralph Griffiths, aimed to give its readers 'a compendious account of those publications of the press, as they come out, that are worth notice' and before long promised to review everything new 'without exception to any, on account of their lowness of rank or price'.⁶⁸ It often included large extracts of the works it chose to devote longer reviews to and was, in fact, a further repository of poetry and prose. Lackington quotes from an obscure poem, 'Superstition, A Moral Essay' by Thomas Prall which was printed in Dover. In 1793 he included three excerpts from this poem in his revised edition of *Memoirs*, all of which are contained within the extract

⁶⁷ Lackington describes how he read 'several of the Reviews of the new publications, which are published monthly' (*C.*, p. 51). See my discussion of his reading in retirement in Chapter 8, pp. 214–16.

⁶⁸ *Monthly Review*, 1 (1749) p. 238, quoted in Antonia Forster, 'Review Journals and the Reading Public' in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (London and New York, Continuum 2003), pp. 171–190 (p. 173).

published in the *Monthly Review* in the first quarter of that year.⁶⁹ Lackington might have come across this relatively newly published poem which was primarily sold in Kent and by Evans in London or, as is more likely, he noted the recent review of this poem with its highly topical title and decided to include it in his assault on ignorance and superstition.

The 1793 edition of *Memoirs* contains more references to contemporary works of poetry and fiction than the 1792 edition and considerably more than the first edition. For example, in 1791, Lackington lists the 'best' novelists as 'Cervantes, Fielding, Smollet, Richardson, Miss Burney, Voltaire, Sterne, Le Sage, Goldsmith, and others' (*M.*, p. 239). These authors fit within those writers identified by St Clair as belonging to the old canon of prose fiction. St Clair writes that the old canon consisted mainly of eighteenth-century novels 'especially *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, the many works of Richardson, Fielding and Smollet, Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Johnson's *Rasselas*, and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and included many translations from French, Spanish and German. *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas* were so wholly absorbed into the old canon as to be regarded almost as English works.'⁷⁰ Lackington includes Voltaire's *Candide* and the novels of Frances Burney and omits mention of *Rasselas*, *Gulliver's Travels* or *Robinson Crusoe* but otherwise his list is consistent with the old canon.

By 1793, he had expanded this selection to include more recent writers: 'by the *best* [novels], I mean those written by Cervantes, Fielding, Smollet, Richardson, Miss Burney, Voltaire, Marmontel, Sterne, Le Sage, Goldsmith, Mackenzie, Dr. Moor, Green, C. Smith, Gunning, Lee, Reeves, Lennox, Radcliff,

⁶⁹ 'Art 46. Superstition: A Moral Essay' in *Monthly Review*, X (1793), 223–224. See quotations in Lackington's *Memoirs*, pp. 53, 63, 136.

⁷⁰ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 130.

and some others' (M., p. 401). Jean François Marmontel (1723–1799) was a member of the French Academy whose lengthy political romance *Bélisaire* was translated into English as *Belisarius* (1767) and frequently reprinted during the later decades of the century, including an edition by Lackington himself in 1784. Lackington adds more female novelists including Sophia Lee (1750–1824) whose novel *The Recess* (1783) was reprinted four times during the 1780s and 90s and widely pirated in Irish editions; Susannah Gunning (1740–1800), a prolific writer from 1763 to the early nineteenth century whose novel *Delves* Lackington published in 1796; Charlotte Lennox (1729–1804), author of *The Female Quixote* (1752) and *Henrietta* (1758), amongst other works; novelist and poet Charlotte Smith (1749–1806); and Clara Reeve (1729–1807), whose *The Old English Baron* (1778) was reprinted frequently in the decades after its first publication, and who had recently written *The School for Widows* (1791). By 1793, Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) had written *The Sicilian Romance* (1790), and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), both of which foreshadowed the popularity of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). John Moore (1729–1802) was the author of *Zeluco* (1789) which sold well in the late 1780s and early 90s. It is difficult to identify 'Green'. The novelist Sarah Green (1763–1808) rose to prominence in the later 1790s when she published her first novel, but in 1793 her *Mental Improvement for a Young lady on Her Entrance into the World* appeared. We cannot know if Lackington actually read all of these works or whether he was simply using his *Memoirs* to promote some relatively recent novelists in the company of popular favourites. The addition of these names does, however, reflect on the way he presents himself in the later editions of *Memoirs*, as a man with his finger on the literary pulse of the nation.

The seventh and later editions: Della Crusca, 'The Femininead', and Others

Lackington added further to his *Memoirs*, late in 1794, in the seventh edition. His changes consist mostly of added quotations and, whilst there are fewer additions than one finds in the 1793 edition, these quotations do raise questions. We find more references to authors who supported the French Revolution and whose work challenged assumptions about the role of women, slavery, and the nature of authority.

In 1793, Lackington had added quotations by Mary Wollstonecraft from her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, excerpts from the writing of the 'milkmaid poet' Anne Yearsley, together with his list of female novelists. In the seventh edition, he included a number of quotations from 'The Femininead: or Female Genius' (1754) by John Duncombe (1729–1786).⁷¹ Duncombe, a Church of England clergyman and friend of Richardson, wrote parodies including 'An Evening Contemplation in a College', a burlesque of Gray's *Elegy*, which Lackington quotes from on page 240 of the seventh and later editions. His 'Femininead' however celebrated the artistic achievement of female poets and is used by Lackington to add weight to his encouragement to women to read.⁷²

We find parody from Isaac Hawkins Browne (1706–1760) in the form of 'The Fireside 1746 A Salute on the Inability of John Carteret, Earl Granville to Form a Ministry'.⁷³ Boswell praised Browne as 'one of the first wits of this country' but complained that once he had got into parliament, he never again

⁷¹ See *Memoirs* 1795, pp. 247, 248, 250, 252.

⁷² See for example his long quotation from this poem on page 248 encouraging women to read.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 140 'The Fireside', and pp. 75 and 150 *Ode II: A Fit of Gout*, both by Browne.

opened his mouth.⁷⁴ Lackington also adds 'An Essay on Sensibility' by William Laurence Brown (1755–1830), poems by poet and playwright, William Whitehead (bap. 1715–1785) who was much admired by Pope, and also extracts from 'The Enlargement of the Mind' by John Langhorne (1735–1779).⁷⁵

Lackington added a number of quotations from a group of poets known as the English Della Crusicans.⁷⁶ Initially this group consisted of rich, newly-risen, upper middle class men enjoying an extended Grand Tour who gravitated to the English community in Florence led by Lord Cowper and frequented by the by now pitiful figure of Charles Edward Stuart. Robert Merry (1755–1798), and fellow writers, sent poetic contributions to *The World* where they were published under pseudonyms. In a review of 'The Poetry of the World', the *Monthly Review* uncovered the identities of the poets declaring:

Thus much, however, we have been fortunate enough to have traced out that *Della Crusca* is supposed to be Mr Merry, that *Arley* is certainly Mr. M.P. Andrew, and that *the Bard* is thought to be a Mr Berkeley.⁷⁷

The reviewer went on to praise Merry or 'Della Crusca' noting that 'several of his pieces claim a distinguished place in the class of modern poetry'.⁷⁸ Merry created a literary sensation when he and poet, Hannah Cowley (1743–1809), writing as 'Anna Matilda', conducted a literary romance in the pages of *The World*.⁷⁹ He achieved equal notoriety, however, when he wrote *The Laurel of Liberty* (1790) in praise of French liberty and reason, which was dedicated 'To the National

⁷⁴ See J.M. Scott, rev. W.B. Hutchings, 'Browne, Isaac Hawkins (1706–1760)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3677> [accessed 9 August, 2013]

⁷⁵ See *Memoirs* 1795, pp. 56, 59, 229, 233, 238 and 239 for quotations from Brown; pp. 98, 104, 127, 148, 216, 239, 256, 315 for quotations from Whitehead; and pp. 159, 160, 229 and 246 for quotations from Langhorne.

⁷⁶ For further information about this group of poets, see W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *The English Della Crusicans and Their Time 1783–1828* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

⁷⁷ 'Art XIV The Poetry of the World', *Monthly Review*, LXXIX (1788), p. 449.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *The English Della Crusicans*, pp. 159–183.

Assembly of France, The True and Zealous Representatives of A Free People with every sentiment of admiration and respect'⁸⁰. The work was praised by radicals such as Thomas Holcroft, John Horne Tooke, and Ralph Griffiths, the editor of the *Monthly Review*, but attracted considerable disapproval from more conservative voices.⁸¹ When Merry decided to travel to France to enjoy the fruits of the revolution in 1792, he found that the mood in Paris was less receptive to reason than he might have wished and was lucky to escape with his life.⁸² Lackington inserted several quotations from 'Della Crusca' and 'Arley' in the seventh and later editions of his *Memoirs* including one from *The Laurel of Liberty* which, again, underlines his liberal leanings.⁸³

Lackington's additions to the seventh and later editions seem to reflect his personal reading preferences. Like those in the 1793 edition, they suggest that at this time he favoured radical, rather than conservative, politics. He quotes from a poem by the evangelical campaigner, Hannah More, 'On Slavery' which he uses to call for education for the lower classes. Those works he draws from in these later editions of his *Memoirs* are not all radical, however, or even recent. They suggest that he was constantly updating and refreshing his presentation of 'self' through his autobiography. Lackington appears to have made no further changes to his *Memoirs* after the death of Dorcas which marked the end of a particularly intellectually vibrant period of his life.

⁸⁰ Robert Merry, *The Laurel of Liberty* (London: John Bell, 1790), dedication.

⁸¹ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *The English Della Cruscans*, p. 217.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 257–8.

⁸³ See *Memoirs* 1795, pp. 95, 257, 262, 267, 280, 302, 319 for examples of quotations from Arley; and p. 115 for 'Ode to Prudence' by Della Crusca, p. 303 for 'The Adieu and Recall to Love' which prompted 'Anna Matilda's' reply and so began the literary romance, and also p. 241 for a poem from *The Laurel of Liberty*.

Conclusion

A detailed study of the *Memoirs* reveals just how intensively Lackington used his reading to fashion the identity which he sold to the public. We find evidence in the many and varied quotations which fill this work of the efforts he took to record what he read, to reflect upon it and, in many instances, to possess it. Lackington's transcription and adaptation of his favourite lines of poetry render them peculiarly his own. He tells the story of his life through these literary borrowings.

By analysing these quotations, this chapter has identified those which Lackington sourced from dictionaries and miscellanies and illustrates how useful these books were to those wishing to enhance their own writing with poetic 'beauties'. Leah Price has argued that these anthologies and miscellanies encouraged users to practice new modes of selective reading, skipping what was less relevant and focusing on what deserved the reader's attention.⁸⁴ These works and this new type of reading appear to put the reader's own particular needs at the very centre of the interaction, although he or she only has access to the selection given to them by the editor of the collection. We see, in Lackington's case, that with the first edition of his *Memoirs*, he largely conforms to the requirements of taste prescribed by editors such as Edward Bysshe. In so doing he inevitably surrenders a degree of authority for his own identity to such arbiters of literary standards. Through the process of rewriting and by selecting more diverse excerpts, however, Lackington creates what is in effect his own commonplace book of quotations, anecdotes, and business advice, contained within the forward

⁸⁴ Leah Price, *The Anthology and The Rise of The Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.

motion of a classic 'rags to riches' plot. This extraordinary gatekeeper of knowledge begins to define, rather than follow, what should be read.

We must remember that Lackington was a man who handled books daily, reviewing their commercial appeal, and watching the way that customers interacted with the printed word. He took upon himself the task of writing sales catalogues twice yearly which presented his stock to the public. Indeed, the publication of his *Memoirs*, with its updated cultural references, seems part of the same public relations exercise. In this work, Lackington extracts his reading as a commodity to increase the value of the 'self' he sells to the public, a 'self' demonstrably created by reading books. Lackington implies that others can emulate his example and seek to boost their position in the world through reading the books he sells. In the next chapter I will examine in greater detail how Lackington used his autobiography to inspire readers.

Chapter Five

INSPIRING READERS

We have seen how Lackington fashioned an identity for himself as a wide-ranging and sophisticated reader, but why did he write and publish his *Memoirs*? For some of his contemporaries, for example some of the writers of reviews, the answer was simple – he wanted to sell more books. The *Monthly Review* noted that putting charges of vanity to one side ‘Mr L. is throughout a sly egoist, and takes industrial opportunities to point out his shop in Chiswell Street, as the *only* market in London for cheap books’, while *The Critical Review* observed that ‘the book is apt to strike as a kind of puffing shop-bill’.¹ As noted in the introduction, James Raven has argued that Lackington’s *Memoirs* are ‘above all a major and successful publicity exercise’.² Raven supports his claim that the exercise was a success by drawing attention to the fact that Lackington’s business boomed during the 1790s. He notes that the description of the early years of this ‘ebullient and ambitious’ figure was ‘designed to appeal to both humble and sophisticated readers’.³ As Raven suggests, Lackington’s use of his *Memoirs* to promote business is more complicated than the phrase ‘puffing shop-bill’ implies.

This chapter will argue that Lackington deliberately constructed his *Memoirs* not just to sell books, but to sell the practice of reading to as broad a spectrum of the public as possible. The *English Review* recognised that ‘the plain

¹ ‘ART. XII. Memoirs of the first Forty-five Years of the Life of James Lackington, the present Bookseller in Chiswell-street, Moorfields, London’, *Monthly Review* (Feb. 1792), 207–219 (p. 208). ‘Memoirs of the first Forty-five Years of the Life of James Lackington, the present Bookseller in Chiswell-street, Moorfields, London’, *The Critical Review*, 4 (Feb. 1792), 196–203 (p. 196).

² James Raven, ‘Selling One’s Life’, p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*

and undissembled manner in which he relates the means of his success, will instruct others, and act at once as a spur and a guide to their industry.'⁴

Lackington is ever careful to extol the benefits of reading which, he suggests, is the source of his success. He presents his life as nothing less than an example to ambitious young men to transform their own lives, as he had done, by devoting themselves to a programme of learning through reading. In later editions, he explicitly targeted another new market of readers, women. This self-publicising required some care, as Lackington seems to have recognised, for he works to avoid antagonising those who might simply have seen him as a vulgar parvenu.

The *Memoirs* begins with a laborious bibliographical flourish with not one, but three dedications, followed by a preface in the first edition and a further preface in all subsequent editions. The dedications do not address a noble patron, as did so many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century examples of this formal introduction to the body of the text. Instead, Lackington addresses his customers. He debates whether to risk flattering them, which might inspire contempt or whether to exhibit 'a flagrant species of ingratitude' by failing to express:

The respect and veneration I entertain for you resulting from the very extensive and ample encouragement with which you have crowned my indefatigable exertions to obtain your patronage, by largely contributing to the diffusion of science and rational entertainment, on such moderate terms as were heretofore unknown. (*M.*, p. vi).

It is characteristic that in thanking his customers, Lackington also points out the unprecedentedly low prices which they enjoy at his shop. Next, he acknowledges 'respectable', then 'sordid and malevolent' booksellers and, in so doing, establishes the framework of a drama of good and bad practice within which the story of his life unfolds. Should his readers find his *Memoirs* dull, he can 'supply

⁴ 'ART. XVI. Memoirs of the First Forty-five Years of the Life of James Lackington, the present Bookseller in Chiswell-Street, Moorfields, London', *English Review*, 17 (Nov. 1791), 375–381 (p. 375).

them with abundance of books, much more worthy, much more – whatever they please, they never shall want books while L. is able to assist them' (*M.*, p. xvii).

There is a playfulness to Lackington's opening matter. He deliberately challenges his readers' expectations of a writer's usual forms of address, debating in print whether or not to include a preface. His principal reason for adding one is that 'custom . . . has rendered a preface almost indispensably necessary', but then, as he reminds us, '*custom is the law of fools*'. He resolves the issue by including the preface and advising all who 'deem it unnecessary' to 'decline reading it'.

Lackington's authorial voice subverts the formal niceties of the preface and reaches out to his readers as an astute, knowing equal. The reader can infer that he or she is interacting with one who is thoroughly familiar with books. In other words, they are in the hands of an expert. By such means, Lackington seems to re-write customary rules of engagement between an author and readers and establishes a series of new relationships, sometimes cajoling, sometimes guiding but always speaking as a seller of books.

As this chapter will illustrate, after having re-defined his role as author, Lackington creates and manages various literary personae which he uses to extend his reach to readers rich and poor. He draws attention to his lowly origins in order to promote reading amongst the poor, but he also works to justify his place amongst the 'middling-sort', or even the gentry. Amongst the many quotations which adorn the *Memoirs*, a large number are drawn from works which address the right use of wealth, or express anxiety about those who, like Lackington, had suddenly risen to high status and, it was feared, threatened to destabilise the social

order.⁵ In order to allay fears that he was just another *arriviste*, Lackington adopts a number of strategies which I will explore in this chapter.⁶ As already discussed, he establishes himself as a man of taste through his adroit use of reading and literary references. He presents himself as a fair-minded businessman – the sort of merchant who had laid the foundations for the commercial prosperity of the nation. He also demonstrates a ‘right’ use of his wealth and his talents whether it be through visiting his poor relations and dispensing charity or aiding poorer, ambitious readers anxious to better themselves as he had done. His preface declares that he wrote his *Memoirs* in order to amuse readers, and to sell them books, but there is one further stated aim which appears to carry more weight than the first two:

Should my memoirs be attended with no other benefit to society, they will at least tend to shew what may be effected by a persevering habit of industry, and an upright conscientious demeanour in trade towards the public, and probably inspire some one, of perhaps superior abilities, with a laudable ambition, to emerge from obscurity, by a proper application of those talents with which providence has favoured him, to his own credit and emolument, as well as the benefit of the community. (*M.*, p. xvii)

Aspiring Readers

The question of whether the number and types of readers were increasing in the late eighteenth century is a contested one. St Clair distinguishes between the ‘reading nation’ of habitual readers and the ‘literate nation’ whose contact with books was ‘largely confined to the reading of commercial documents, manuscript

⁵ I will refer to these quotations later in the chapter, but see, for example, Pope’s ‘Epistle III: To Allen Lord Bathurst’ (*M.*, pp. 72, 368, 373, 430), Cowper’s, ‘The Task’ (*M.*, p. 249), William Somervile’s *The Fortune Hunter* (*M.*, p. 206), Samuel Foote’s *The Minor* (*M.*, pp. 84, 106, 107).

⁶ Raven notes that three groups in particular provoked concern in the later eighteenth century – nabobs made suddenly rich in India, planter who grew their wealth in the West Indies, and manufacturers who built businesses at home: see his *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England 1750–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 223–4.

Figure 7: Lackington's portrait

ledgers, accounts, and letters directly associated with their employment'.⁷ Whilst Richard Wittman concludes that there was a 'reading revolution' during the eighteenth century, St Clair questions whether the huge increase in the output of printed matter in the last quarter of the century means that the composition and size of the 'reading nation' changed as much as has been suggested. He concedes that readerships increased but also notes that existing readers took advantage of lower prices to buy more books.⁸

St Clair, like many other historians of reading, cites Lackington's confident assertion that farmers and 'poor country people in general' owned copies of *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random* which they 'stuck up on their bacon racks'.⁹ These 'poorer sort' of farmers and artisans, perhaps members of the 'literate' rather than 'reading' nation, are deliberately targeted by Lackington as potential customers. He draws upon his own experience of reading as a young apprentice in order to craft his *Memoirs* so as to inspire them to emulate the example of his rags to riches life story. Right at the opening of the book opposite the title page, he introduces himself to his readers in an engraving showing a prosperous and well-dressed figure (see Figure 7). Beneath the picture appear the lines 'I.

LACKINGTON. *Who a few years since began Business with five Pounds, now sells one Hundred Thousand Volumes Annually.*' Above is the motto, '*Sutor Ultra Crepidam Feliciter ausus*'. Lackington here adapts the popular maxim '*ne sutor supra crepidam*' or 'let the cobbler stick to his last', announcing instead, that this cobbler (*sutor*) has fortunately dared (*feliciter ausus*) to move beyond his

⁷ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation In The Romantic Period*, p. 13.

⁸ Richard Wittmann, 'Was there a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?' in *A History of Reading in the West* ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 284–312; St Clair, *The Reading Nation*, p. 118.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119. See also Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 39; and Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 151.

last (*ultra crepidam*). In brief, he has transcended his station and the trade to which he was born and trained.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the early chapters of the *Memoirs* describe Lackington's unpromising upbringing spent in rural poverty but this account is preceded by the light-hearted announcement that he is 'a Son of the renowned PRINCE CRISPIN'. This is an allusion to the patron saint of shoemakers, and the subject of Thomas Deloney's sixteenth-century prose work, *History of the Gentle Craft* (c. 1597) which is discussed in Chapter 2. He continues in a similar vein:

A volume has been written with the title of "The Honor of the Taylors; or, the History of Sir JOHN HAWKWOOD." But were any learned writer to undertake ——— The honor of the Shoemakers, or the History of ———, how insignificant a figure would the poor Taylors make, when compared with the honourable craft!

"Coblers from Crispin boast their Public Spirit,
"And all are upright downright men of merit."

Should I live to see as many editions of my Memoirs published, as there have been of the Pilgrim's Progress, I may be induced to present the world with a Folio on that important subject. (*M.*, p. 37)

William Winstanley's *The Honour of the Taylors, or The Famous and Renowned History of Sir John Hawkwood, Knight, Containing His Many Rare and Singular Adventures, Witty Expoits, Heroick Atchievements, and Noble Performances, Relating to Love and Arms in Many Lands* (1687) records the exploits of a tailor, John Hawkwood, 'of parentage but mean', who eventually attains glory and renown and was raised 'to a considerable degree and advancement in the record of never-dying fame'.¹⁰ As Lackington well knew, and as the lines quoted from Francis Fawkes's 'Epithalamium on the Marriage of

¹⁰ William Winstanley, *The Honour of the Taylors* (London: Alexander Milbourn for William Whitwood, 1687), p. 1. EEBO records an earlier, second edition, *The Honour of Merchant-Taylors: Wherein is Set Forth the Noble Acts, Valient Deeds, and Heroick Performances of Merchant-Taylors in Former Ages* (1668). I will refer to the later edition, since the long title suggests this is one Lackington encountered.

a Cocker and a Chimney Sweep' (1761) illustrate, many tales celebrating the honour of shoemakers, such as that of St Crispin, already existed, some of which were gathered in Deloney's book.¹¹ These chronicled the innate worth of cobblers like Simon Eyre who rose from humble origins to become Lord Mayor of London. They also recorded legends of more illustrious individuals conferring status and honour on the trade, such as the knight, later St Hugh, who joined a company of shoemakers whilst in exile, and the royal princes and saints, Crispin and Crispianus, who sought refuge from a tyrant by adopting the craft of cobbling. The birth of Crispin's son was presented as fulfilment of the prophecy that 'A shoemaker's son is a Prince born'. The association of shoemaking with royalty had become part of common street parlance. Cobbling was known as the 'gentle craft', because, as a dictionary of the 'vulgar tongue' reminds us, it was 'once practised by St Crispin.'¹²

Aspirational tales like these were reproduced in chapbooks, retold in ballads and songs and repeated amongst the guilds, and Lackington alludes to them as a reminder to readers of the worth and value of artisans.¹³ There is an interesting tension, evident in Deloney and Winstanley's tales, between stories of craftsmen like Eyre who were raised to high status by their own merits and those in which nobility is conferred on the trade by the patronage of men of exalted rank. Whilst the tensions are not quite the same in the *Memoirs*, Lackington nonetheless handles the account of his success and social ascent with care, sometimes

¹¹ This quotation from Fawkes's poem, can be found under the heading 'Cobler' in *A Poetical Dictionary* (London: J. Newbery, J. Richardson, and others, 1761), p. 158.

¹² See 'GENTLECRAFT' in Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: S. Hooper, 1785), s.v.

¹³ For examples of songs celebrating St Crispin, see 'The Shoemaker's Glory' in Thomas Deloney's *The History of the Gentle Craft*; 'On St Crispin's Day, October 25th, 1763' in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* by 'Claudero, Son of Nimrod the Mighty Hunter' (Edinburgh: for the author, 1766), p. 69.

speaking to his readers as equals, and sometimes adopting a self-deprecating tone. Whilst his presentation of self is complex and shifting, however, Lackington's message is absolutely clear: – his social transformation was brought about through reading.

In referring to *The Honour of the Taylors* and, by implication, *The History of the Gentle Craft*, Lackington establishes a framework for his *Memoirs* with which he could expect poorer, as well as wealthier, readers to be familiar. Chapbook versions of Deloney's work with titles such as *The Shoemaker's Glory or the Princely History of the Gentle Craft* (1720) were printed throughout the eighteenth century. *The History of the Gentle Craft* is listed in catalogues priced at between 6d and 1s 6d, making it considerably cheaper than many other works.¹⁴ Thomas Holcroft, himself the son of a shoemaker, writes of the pleasure he derived from two old chapbook tales given to him as a child living in poverty in a 'retired spot' in Berkshire, which illustrates the reach of such books.¹⁵ Lackington presents himself as a chapbook hero, a new Whittington or Eyre to inspire artisan readers.

Affluent readers

Whilst Lackington recognised the potential market for books amongst groups of poorer new readers, he took care to avoid alienating readers with more money to spend on luxuries by appearing too complacent in his acquisition of wealth and

¹⁴ See ESTC for reference to this 24 page 'chapbook version of stories in Thomas Deloney's *Gentle Craft*, first published in 1637'. *The History of the Gentle Craft* is listed in *Bibliotheca Annuæ* (1704) Thomas Scollick's catalogue for 1788, and William Collins 1786 catalogue, priced at 6d; it cost 1s 6d in Wagstaff's *Second Catalogue for 1771*, 3s in George Sael's *Catalogue of an Extensive Collection of Curious Books* (1794), and a hefty 6s for a black letter edition, dating to 1676, in Thomas and John Egerton's 1789 catalogue.

¹⁵ Thomas Holcroft, *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*, ed. by William Hazlitt (London: Longman, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1816), I, pp. 10–13.

position. He therefore adapted the tone of his writing so as to show deference to his customers and by appearing to understand the social niceties of taste and politeness which contemporary literary culture satirised the *nouveaux riches* for ignoring. He aligned himself with examples of merchants lauded for their good manners, whilst gently ridiculing his picaresque past.

John McVeagh traces changing attitudes to wealth in the eighteenth century, noting a growing anxiety about the effect of commercialisation on the nation.¹⁶ There was concern that the sudden acquisition of vast wealth by ambitious merchants of the East India Company, planters from the West Indies and home-grown industrialists would spread degeneration through the land. This anxiety was widely reflected in literature. Oliver Goldsmith's poem, 'The Deserted Village' (1770), for example, portrays the destruction of rural life in Auburn, cleared of inhabitants by a wealthy landowner who seeks profit from his land and neglects his responsibilities to his tenants.¹⁷ Charlotte Smith, an author recommended by Lackington, presented her readers with particularly unflattering portraits of new wealth in the form of the Ludfords and the Matravers in her novel, *Ethelinde* (1789).¹⁸ Raven writes of growing hostility to the newly wealthy, observing that by the late eighteenth century, the meaning of the word 'vulgar' was changing. Whereas it once referred to the 'ordinary' or 'commonplace', it was increasingly linked with deviance from standards of taste when describing the lower social orders.¹⁹ Notions of taste were becoming more important towards the end of the century.

¹⁶ John McVeagh, *Tradeful Merchants: The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 20.

¹⁷ See quotes from 'The Deserted Village' in *Memoirs*, pp. 216, 498.

¹⁸ See Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, pp. 146–9 for a discussion of *Ethelinde*.

¹⁹ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 138.

The charge of being a parvenu could be applied to Lackington. Whilst the story of his extraordinary transformation from poverty to considerable wealth was designed to inspire poorer readers, he also adopts a number of strategies to avoid alienating wealthier readers and customers. He works to display the good taste and the broad reading which demonstrates his innate 'worth' and sets him apart from the literary stereotype of the uncultivated *nouveaux riches*. As we have seen in Chapter 3, he also distances his affluent older self from the impoverished, 'enthusiastic' youth he presents to readers. We find examples of Lackington the writer chuckling at the beliefs of young Lackington, the subject of his tale. He sets himself apart, through his virulent attacks on Methodism, from the religious organisation of which he had been so conscientious a member. Whilst Lackington was attracted to ideas which were incompatible with Methodist faith, there is perhaps an element of snobbery – intellectual and social – to his satirical attacks on 'enthusiasm' and on an organisation which attracted artisans and labourers.

Lackington's reflections on the absurdities and the errors of his past fit within what Jean Starobinski has identified as the 'picaresque' style of autobiography:

Traditionally, the picaresque narrative is attributed to a character who has arrived at a certain stage of ease and "respectability" and who retraces, through an adventurous past, his humble beginnings at the fringes of society.²⁰

The writer of this type of autobiography can speak of his past with 'irony, condescension, pity, amusement'. The narrative tone presupposes an addressee, 'a confidante who is made an indulgent and amused accomplice by the

²⁰ Jean Starobinski, 'The Style of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 73–83 (p. 82).

playfulness with which the most outrageous behaviour is recounted'.²¹

Lackington ostensibly writes to an un-named friend, but the anonymity of this 'friend' draws in other readers to the role of confidante. He writes as an avowed rationalist, a man steeped in reading and he gives a confidential 'nod' to other such men, forging a bond of complicity with the affluent and the enlightened.²²

It is very much in this vein that Lackington includes a tale of his younger self being terrified by a strange shape looming out of the twilight. Scared, yet determined to discover what this shape might be, young Lackington 'obstinately ventured on' until he recognised it to be 'only a very short tree' newly lopped of its branches (*M.*, p. 55).²³ He follows this story with other tales describing hauntings, ghosts and other 'supernatural' occurrences which inevitably have a rational explanation and which are very much in the tradition of the popular and literary responses to the notorious incident of the 'Cock Lane Ghost' in 1762. The mysterious and sensational nocturnal scratching of this 'ghost' was proved to have human origins and its unmasking provoked a huge literary response in the form of pamphlets, ballads and plays.²⁴ Lackington not only shows himself to be *au fait* with literature which celebrated the triumph of rationalism over superstition, but in his account of his own 'haunting', he presents himself as one made of sturdier stuff than his fearful companions. He appears less susceptible to the fear evoked by superstition than the other villagers, which perhaps, marks him

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²² I use the word 'men' intentionally since this bond does seem gendered and 'club-ish'.

²³ Lackington's tale of encountering this terrifying tree, together with another anecdote, is included in the short collection, *An Account of Some Imaginary Apparitions: The Effect of Fear or Fraud From Various Authors* (Dunbar: Miller, 1792), pp. 9–13.

²⁴ See E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 22. See also p. 14 for examples of literary responses such as *The Mystery Reveal'd* attributed to Oliver Goldsmith or Charles Churchill's 'The Ghost'. This event became associated with a number of other strange happenings such as the reported 'birth' to Mary Tofts of a litter of rabbits in 1726. William Hogarth drew these together in his popular print *Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism* (1762) which portrays these 'miracles' taking place in a chapel presided over by a wildly gesturing Methodist preacher.

out as superior to his companions, even worthy of the future which lay ahead for him.

Throughout the *Memoirs* we see an association between ignorance, illiteracy and low social class. This grouping is particularly focused in his presentation of Methodists despite the extraordinary efforts of John Wesley to promote reading and learning amongst his preachers and followers, from which Lackington clearly benefited. Nonetheless, he attacks Methodist preachers for their ignorance:

Although there are amongst them some truly sensible, intelligent men, yet the major part are very ignorant and extremely illiterate: many of these excellent spiritual guides cannot read a chapter in the bible, though containing the deep mysteries which they have the rashness and presumption to pretend to explain. Many others cannot write their own names. (*M.*, pp. 316–7)

He continues his reflections by considering how ignorance is allied with poor manners and low social status:

It is always observable, that the more ignorant people are, the more confidence they possess. This confidence, or *impudence*, passes with the vulgar, as a mark of their being in the right; and the more the ignorance of the preachers is discovered, the more are they brought down to their own standard. (*M.*, p. 318)

Implied, once again, in such condemnation, is the value of learning and literacy as Lackington again sets himself apart from his former fellows.

Lackington does not simply separate himself from his past by criticising his former way of life. He uses his reading in a much more interesting way, to fictionalise his younger self, and to connect with readers by evoking a shared experience of reading the same books. Some of the incidents of boyish mischievousness he relates consciously draw upon the picaresque tradition by suggesting the early careers of literary heroes such as Tom Jones or Gil Blas. Fielding and Le Sage portray their talented, resourceful characters spurned by

fortune and society until they eventually receive their dues. The fates of these young men could be seen to justify the good fortune of someone like Lackington. His teasing of local butchers by yawning, his determined discovery of the 'horror' on the road ahead, even his romantic entanglements with dairy maids and his leaping from a window to hear field preachers are narrated in a self-consciously dramatic manner:

But when we had walked about a quarter of a mile, I saw at some distance before us in the hedge, the dreadful apparition that had so terrified our company. Here it is! (said I). "Lord have mercy upon us!" replied some of the company . . . As I proceeded I too was seized with a timid apprehension, but durst not own it; still keeping on before, although I perceived my hair to heave my hat from my head, and my teeth to chatter in my mouth. (*M.*, p. 54-5)

The author is transformed from a middle-aged bookseller to a generally likeable, daring hero - another young Jones getting into scrapes. The writing is animated by dialogue and dramatic hyperbole in such details as Lackington's chattering teeth and his hair standing on end.

Lackington appears to mimic Fielding's style consciously when writing the chapter summaries which appear in the table of contents of the first edition and in the index of some later editions. He refers to himself in these in the third person, often as 'our hero', as, for example, in the summary of Letter III:

Our hero is sent to school. His wonderful progress in learning. A recapitulation of some of his juvenile exploits. Becomes agent to an eminent *pie merchant*. More ingenious exploits. Elopes. Is by his father initiated into the *gentle craft*. (*M.*, 1791, p. xxii)

Lackington employs many of the tools of the mock-heroic form in these and other early chapter summaries. We find ironical juxtaposition in the bathetic italicised comparison of the 'pie merchant' with his 'wonderful progress in learning'; and an instance of dramatic staccato in 'Elopes'. This tone of jocular irony is highly reminiscent of Fielding's introduction to chapter two, book three of *Tom Jones*:

The Heroe of this great History appears with very bad Omens. A little Tale of so LOW a Kind, that some may think it not worth their notice. A Word or two concerning a Squire, and more relating to a Gamekeeper, and a Schoolmaster.²⁵

Lackington's tone changes when he discusses business matters and events which occur later in his life. He identifies himself as 'the author' in these chapter summaries. For example, Letter XXXV is summarised as:

The author's mode of stating his profits and expenses. Hints and insinuations for him to decline business. His reasons for not doing it. His attention to poor relations. Proofs that his mode of selling has not been on the whole injurious, but rather beneficial to the trade. (*M.*, 1791, p. xxx)

This passage clearly lacks the humour of the earlier examples. Whereas Lackington's boyish indiscretions and humble beginnings are represented in literary, mock-heroic terms, his judgements as a businessman are not. Indeed, he presents himself as a compassionate giver of charity, the victim of 'insinuations' and threats to his reputation whilst all the while having conducted business in a way 'beneficial to the trade'. He appears to be the model of the sort of responsible merchant which the prosperity of the country was built upon. Perhaps Lackington hoped that just as the hearts of readers warmed towards young Tom Jones and wished him good fortune, they would be similarly inclined to his own younger self, and that the narrative convention of a happy ending would win the approval of readers, rich or poor, for the prosperous outcome of his own first forty-five years.

The *Memoirs* employs other literary references to 'sell' the life of the author and the beneficial effects of reading to wealthier readers. As discussed earlier, both McVeagh and Raven observe the increasingly hostile treatment of men of commerce in literature at the end of the eighteenth century. McVeagh traces a

²⁵ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. R. P. C. Mutter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 123.

perceived descent from a sense of optimism about the status of trade at the beginning of the century to one of deep mistrust by the 1790s.²⁶ Raven discerns a distinction between new money and more respectable merchants. He writes that what distinguished one from the other was how individuals used their wealth:

It was in terms of the proper use of riches, central to the definition of the gentleman, that the charity and thrift of the merchant came to be contrasted with the life-style and activities of the nabob, petty trader, and parvenu manufacturer.²⁷

Lackington compares himself to the prosperous shopman, Ned Drugget, described by Samuel Johnson in the *Idler*. Drugget emerges from Johnson's account as a model businessman whose career was distinguished by his industrious attitude and civility. We are told that his 'exemplary conduct was recommended by every master to his apprentice and by every father to his son' and that 'Ned was not only considered as a thriving Trader, but as a man of Elegance and Politeness'.²⁸ He made his fortune by degrees and dreamed of living in the country. Johnson visits him when he has fulfilled this dream and finds him watching traffic pass by in the dust of the London Road in Islington which, Johnson suggests, falls rather short of his own expectations of a country retirement. Correspondents, however, defended Ned's unsophisticated delight in watching carriages pass in this way.²⁹ Lackington compares himself to one whose simple pleasures threatened the vanity of none, and whose impeccable manners and dignity of bearing make him a model for all - the very embodiment of the conduct literature which was so popular during the century.

²⁶ See Chapters 3 and 4 of McVeagh's, *Tradefull Merchants*.

²⁷ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 258.

²⁸ Samuel Johnson, 'Idler' 16 in *Payne's Universal Chronicle or Weekly Gazette* (1758).

²⁹ Correspondents defended Drugget writing that 'life is so full of misery, that we are glad to catch delight without inquiring whence it come' and 'he that is happy, by whatever means, desires nothing but the continuance of happiness', 'Idler' 18 (1758).

Lackington uses the story of Drugget's progress at a critical moment in his *Memoirs* when he discusses his present wealth and status:

If you will please to refer to Dr. Johnson's "Idler" for "the progress of Ned Drugget," you will see much of the progress of your humble servant depicted. Like Ned, in the beginning I opened and shut my own shop, and welcomed a friend by a shake of the hand. About a year after, I beckoned across the way for *a pot of good porter*. A few years after that, I sometimes invited my friends to dinner, and provided them a roasted *fillet of veal*; in a progressive course the *ham* was introduced, and a *pudding* was the next addition made to the feast. (*M.*, p. 432)

He continues to chronicle the escalation of luxuries in his lifestyle, through a sequence which includes 'a country *lodging*', 'a country *house*', and eventually, 'a *chariot*'. He selects '*Upper Merton* the most rural village in Surry [sic]' as his idyll and retreats there, not to watch carriages pass, but 'as the seat of occasional philosophic retirement' (*M.*, p. 433). By associating his extraordinary social ascent with the literary reputation of Johnson, and the precedent of so unassuming and deserving a figure as Drugget, Lackington once again, aims to deflect censure for his success.

A little later, Lackington makes a clear distinction between two different types of merchants when he distinguishes between the 'very opulent tradesmen who have not had an idea but what they have acquired behind the counter' and the 'many thousands of the same class of life who are professed of very liberal ideas, and who would not commit an action that would disgrace a title' (*M.*, p. 504). He ponders this just after describing his happy return to his childhood home in Wellington where, significantly, he reports that he was pleased to bestow charity liberally and embrace former acquaintances without misplaced pride. In order to reinforce his claims to respectability, Lackington alludes to the special status of

English merchants as observed by Philip Thicknesse (1719-1792).³⁰ Thicknesse writes that tradesmen on the continent are seen 'in a degrading point of view, merely for being of that class, nor would the most honourable or respectable behaviour ever raise them in the ideas of estimation of the nobles or gentry, who are taught to treat them with neglect and even contempt' (*M.*, p. 505). In England the situation is different:

In England the merchants and respectable tradesmen, being held in higher estimation, and often admitted to the company, conversation, and honours of higher classes, the sordid mind by degrees imbibes more liberal sentiments, and the rough manners receive a degree of polish. (*M.*, p. 505)

Lackington appears to be appealing to the patriotic instincts of his more illustrious readers to admit him into their company whilst also suggesting that it is through the conversation of the higher classes that his own 'sordid mind' has acquired 'more liberal sentiments'.

Raven traces the increase in the production and sale of conduct literature during the eighteenth century and perceives a balance of opinion in favour of the idea that it was no longer necessary to be of good birth to be a gentleman. This led to a greater weight being placed on the value of good taste and fuelled the sale of manuals instructing readers on how to behave. Meanwhile novels and plays were reinforcing these notions of refinement by presenting examples of false taste, such as Frances Burney's portrayal of the Broughton family in *Evelina*.³¹ Throughout his *Memoirs*, Lackington implicitly and explicitly illustrates the ways in which reading has equipped him to operate in a world in which taste is used as the basis for judging social worth. This accounts for the many quotations which

³⁰ Thicknesse, who had sailed to Georgia with General Oglethorp and the Wesley brothers in 1735, wrote a series of travel books and guides. His *Observations on the Customs and Manners of the French Nation* (1766) took issue with Smollett's account of France. For further information, see Katherine Turner, 'Thicknesse, Philip (1719-1792)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27181> [accessed 30 November, 2012].

³¹ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, pp. 146-50.

stand as tangible examples of the ease with which he handles literature and poetry which, as St Clair points out, and as we saw in Chapter 4, were seen as vehicles for instilling moral values cherished by society.³²

Lackington uses quotations taken from works which are critical of the misuse of wealth, and which draw attention to the 'vulgarity' of the newly rich and expose their ignorance. For example, he quotes from Pope's *On the Use of Riches: An Epistle to the Right Honourable Allen Lord Bathurst* (1733) which contrasts the greed of Sir Balaam with the charity of the Man of Ross. Elsewhere, we find a reference to William Somervile's 'The Fortune Hunter' (1726), which presents readers with a fable of two brothers which illustrates the right and the wrong uses of riches in their contrasting life styles. Whilst 'Bob' marries and looks after his estate, 'Panky' enjoys wine, women and gambling, loses his fortune and suffers a series of disasters until he comes to understand the error of his ways. James Bramston's 'The Man of Taste: Occasion'd by an Epistle of Mr Pope's on that Subject' (1733) satirises the fickle indulgence in fads. We learn that Bramston's narrator did not 'waste' his youth in education. Lackington made reference to this on the title page of his second edition, but removed it by the third, which suggests that he thought better of applying this satirical aside to his own life. He includes quotations from Anstey's *New Bath Guide* (1766) which deals with the social ineptitude of the Blunderhead family.

The Value of Reading

Lackington's *Memoirs* are not only a vehicle for drawing attention to his business and promoting the benefits of reading in his own life. He also uses them to

³² St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 133.

emphasise the value of reading to others. He depicts reading as an activity which has enabled him to make a considerable fortune and advance socially; but perhaps more importantly, it 'affords an endless source of pleasure' in his life (*M.*, p. 408). Bookshops are compared to 'schools where the knowledge of mankind is to be acquired', and there are many examples in later editions of his *Memoirs* of the ways in which reading could enrich the lives of specific social groups, particularly women and poorer readers (*M.*, p. 414).

One of the first examples of the benefits of female reading occurs in Lackington's description of his second wife, Dorcas:

My new wife's attachment to books was a very fortunate circumstance for us both, not only as it was a perpetual source of rational amusement, but also as it tended to promote my trade. (*M.*, p. 353)

He presents readers with a picture of Dorcas happily attending to business in the shop. She is shown to be a helpmate as well as an intelligent and entertaining companion to the author. After observing that 'by far the greatest part of ladies have now a taste for books', Lackington seeks to encourage them to read and purchase more (*M.*, p. 422). He cites Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to urge women to 'polish their understanding, and render themselves fit companions for men of sense' (*M.*, p. 423). A previous generation of advice writers had cautioned women against appearing to be better read and more informed than their husbands. Lackington, however, follows Wollstonecraft in disagreeing with the highly popular and influential writer of conduct literature, John Gregory:

I am sorry that Dr. Gregory had some reason for giving the following advice to his daughters; "If you happen, says he, to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts." My

God, what sort of men must these be; and what degrading ideas must they have of women. (*M.*, p. 425)³³

Alluding to Wollstonecraft's arguments, he persuades women that a man married to 'a fine lady' or a 'square elbow family drudge' without learning will have 'no great inducement . . . to desire the company of his wife, as she scarce can be called a rational companion, or one fit to be entrusted with the education of her children' (*M.*, p. 423).

Lackington compares English attitudes to women favourably with that of foreigners who treat women with contempt. He points out that:

English ladies . . . now in general read, not only novels, although many of that class are excellent productions, and tend to polish both the heart and head; but they also read the best books in the English language, and many read the best works in various languages; and there are some thousands of ladies, which come to my shop, that know as well what books to choose, and are as well acquainted with works of taste and genius, as any gentlemen in the kingdom, notwithstanding the sneer [sic] against the novel readers, &c. (*M.*, pp. 424–25)³⁴

Lackington suggests to women that far from becoming more attractive in the marriage market if they do not read, they will be considerably less so. In order to convince further, he cites the example of a gentleman who 'lately rode fifty miles, for the pleasure of seeing and conversing with a learned woman'. The woman in question was Elizabeth Ogilvie Benger (bap. 1775, d. 1827), 'a tide waiter's daughter' who, despite poverty, developed a love of learning so great that she gathered 'bits of paper in the street' to feed it. We are told that 'she understands Latin, Greek, Italian, Spanish and other languages, is well versed in various branches of arts and sciences' (*M.*, p. 426).³⁵ This account is followed by a long

³³ See John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (London: W. Stahan, T. Cadell, J. Balfour, W. Creech, 1774), pp. 31–2.

³⁴ St Clair points out that numerous conduct books warned women against reading romances; see *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 344.

³⁵ See, Rosemary Mitchell, 'Benger, Elizabeth Ogilvy (bap. 1775, d. 1827)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2093 [accessed 30 November, 2012].

quotation from 'On Mrs Montagu' by another poor woman who benefitted from her education, the 'milkmaid poet', Ann Yearsley (bap. 1753, d. 1806).³⁶

Lackington's encouragement to women to read becomes ever more prominent in successive editions of the *Memoirs*. In the seventh edition, he inserts four quotations from John Duncombe's poem, *The Feminead: or Female Genius* (1757).³⁷ The fact that in 1793, he cites the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft in some detail suggests that he had read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a recent publication.³⁸ St Clair dismisses the impact of this book, arguing that it was 'swamped' by the sheer volume of conduct literature on the market and that relatively small print runs ensured that access was limited.³⁹ Lackington's familiarity with the work is striking therefore and his inclusion of its thesis in his *Memoirs* will have brought it to the attention of readers.

He is also unusual in his endorsement of the novel, a literary form frequently dismissed as unsuitable reading for women by both male and female commentators. James Fordyce wrote that novels were 'utterly unfit' for women and, furthermore, 'Instruction they convey none'.⁴⁰ Hester Chapone was reluctant to condemn the reading of publications which she recognised young people were 'naturally fond of', but urged care in choosing books which enflamed passions. She ends her reflections quite as vehemently as Fordyce, however, warning that indiscriminate reading of such books 'corrupts more female hearts than any other

³⁶ See Mary Waldron, 'Yearsley [née Cromartie], Ann (bap. 1753, d. 1806)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30206 [accessed 30 November, 2012].

³⁷ See, *M.*, 7th edition, pp. 247, 248, 250, 252.

³⁸ Lackington includes a passage taken from p. 121, a quotation from Rousseau on p. 197, and the phrase 'a square elbow family drudge' alluding to 'square elbowed family drudge' used by Wollstonecraft on p. 145, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792).

³⁹ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 278.

⁴⁰ James Fordyce, 'Sermon IV: On Female Virtue' in *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols (London: A. Millar, T. Cadell and others, 1766), I, p. 149.

cause whatsoever.’⁴¹ By contrast, Lackington defends novel-reading, arguing that many novels ‘are excellent productions, and tend to polish both the heart and head’. His motives may have been predominantly commercial since not only did he wish to sell this popular genre, but he also published some novels. His support of the novel anticipates Jane Austen’s famous defence in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), which was written a few years later, at the end of the century.

Lackington also promotes the value of reading to poorer readers. He observes that more than four times the number of books were sold at the time of writing than twenty years previously. This he attributes to an influx of new readers to the market:

The poorer sort of farmers, and even the poor country people in general, who before that period spent their winter evenings in relating stories of witches, ghosts, hobgoblins, &c. now shorten the winter nights by hearing their sons and daughters read tales, romances, &c. . . . If *John* goes to town with a load of hay, he is charged to be sure not to forget to bring home “Peregrine Pickle’s Adventures;” and when *Dolly* is sent to market to sell her eggs, she is commissioned to purchase “The History of Pamela Andrews.” In short, all ranks and degrees now READ. (*M.*, pp. 420–1)

Richard Altick is highly sceptical of Lackington’s picture of a rural reading idyll, observing that ‘only a minority of rural families had a single literate in their midst, and few of those that did could obtain books.’ He goes on to comment that it would have cost Dolly several times the value of her eggs to buy her book, and he dismisses as ‘sheer fantasy’ the statement that all ranks read.⁴² Lackington’s remarks, however, should perhaps be seen in the same light as those concerning discerning women readers; that is, they are made *pour encourager les autres*. He writes to try to raise expectations of readers, rather than to reflect the state of the nation.

⁴¹ Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed to a Young Lady*, 2 vols (London: H. Hughes for J. Walker, 1773), II, pp. 144–6.

⁴² Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader*, pp. 39–40. See also Chapter 6 for the cost of these books in Lackington’s own catalogues, pp. 171–72.

Lackington's presentation of the effect of reading on the home-lives of 'poor country people' is consistent with his assessment of its value in his own life. He shows how this rational pursuit might reform the nation by sweeping away superstitious practices and replacing them with an activity which his *Memoirs* proves can enrich lives, mentally and physically. In order to reinforce his message, he quotes thirty lines from Goldsmith's poem 'The Traveller' (1764). These are taken from a passage which describes a Swiss peasant community mired in 'low' pleasures and equally 'low' morals (*M.*, p. 428). 'Enlightenment of the understandings', argues Lackington, can only make such people happier and more useful to society. He adds lines from Hannah More's poem 'Slavery' to the seventh edition, comparing the lot of the uneducated poor to a state of enslavement (*M.*, 1795, p. 244). Perhaps if Lackington is not appealing to the very poorest in society to emulate their peers and begin to read, he is instead pricking the anxiety of those slightly higher up the social order, prompting them to read more and to buy books before they are overtaken by those who do seek learning.

For all those who do possess an ambition to better the lives of their families, Lackington draws attention to the Sunday School movement. This he sees as accelerating 'the diffusion of knowledge among the lower classes of the community' (*M.*, p. 427). Once again, however, he encourages those interested in promoting these institutions to broaden their curriculum and, by implication, to read more books. He argues that children make better progress in reading when they are 'entertained as well as instructed' and that 'the introducing histories, romances, stories, poems, &c. into schools, has been a very great means of diffusing a general taste for reading among all ranks of people' (*M.*, p. 429). He

goes on to insist that when children ‘only read the Bible (which was the case in many schools a few years ago)’, they did not make such good progress. This is not necessarily reflected in Lackington’s own experience, but it does serve to promote the buying of books to educators. St Clair writes of a ‘rapid growth of a new children’s book industry’ after 1774 which ‘drew on, anthologised, and abridged the out-of-copyright authors’.⁴³ It is in order to boost sales of these works that Lackington recommends that young readers be given a wider range of reading matter, than simply the Bible. Yet again, his commercial aspirations are enfolded within an evangelising desire to promote reading as a social benefit.

Conclusion

Lackington’s *Memoirs* insist upon the value of reading both to individuals and to society and it is in the urgency of his appeal to potential customers that Lackington promotes his business. His own story can be seen as an exemplum for the poor, encouraging them to follow his example and make their fortune in a manner reminiscent of folk tales or chapbook stories. He also strives to justify his social ascent to wealthier readers and demonstrate the value of reading in polishing the taste, the manners, and the mind of the author. It is consistent with his astute understanding of business that he specifically promotes the benefits of reading to groups of readers relatively new to the market – women and the less affluent. Both of these groups were the subjects of deep concerns about the effect of reading on their moral well-being. As James Raven puts it, ‘Lackington’s life was a risky exercise successfully achieved.’⁴⁴ He had created a ‘brand’ for his business, centred on his own extraordinary story and easily digestible in book

⁴³ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Raven, ‘Selling One’s Life’, p. 14.

form. It appears that the *Memoirs* did inspire readers to seek out Lackington's shop and buy books. In the next chapter, I will examine in more detail the ways in which Lackington appealed to these potential customers through other methods of marketing, including the publication of elaborate catalogues of the books he offered for sale.

Chapter Six

SELLING READING AND SERVING READERS

In this chapter we will turn away from the *Memoirs* to look at the bookselling catalogues which still survive from Lackington's business in Chiswell Street and from the Temple of the Muses. These documents provide valuable evidence which complements the account we read in the *Memoirs*. As the nexus where seller and distant buyer met, the catalogues can yield a rich source of information about what was offered for sale, how it was priced and how it was presented to potential customers. This chapter will look more closely at specific ways in which Lackington used his catalogues to reach out to the new markets of readers identified in Chapter 5. It will argue that, in all his dealings with the public, whether in his *Memoirs* or in the sales catalogues, he developed a distinctive Lackington 'brand' which promised low prices, good value, and fair dealings to readers and customers. This brand can be seen as part of what Richard Altick describes as Lackington's 'aggressive enterprise' in which he 'cheerfully' violated 'all the traditions of the trade'. Some of Lackington's business decisions may not have been quite so novel as he himself claims, but evidence from the catalogues shows that he approached bookselling with an energy and understanding which, Altick recognises, was to offer benefits to the common reader of Lackington's own age as well as future generations.¹

¹ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 57.

Building communications with readers

Lackington's catalogues, produced annually and later biannually, were constructed with care, and it is evident that he was conscious of just how important they were in presenting his shop to readers. He relates that he had argued about these documents with his early partner, John Denis. According to Lackington, Denis described certain 'scarce old mystical and alchymical books' as 'neat' when they were actually in poor condition, with the result that 'sometimes our *neat* articles were heartily *damned*' (*M.*, p. 356). The experience prompted Lackington to take charge of their compilation thereafter:

I never had one shopman who knew any thing of the worth of books, or how to write a single page of catalogue properly, much less to compile the whole. I always wrote them myself, so long as my health would permit: indeed I continued the practice for years after my health was much impaired by too constant an application to that and reading; and when I was at last obliged to give up writing them, I for several catalogues stood by and dictated to others; even to the present time I take some little part in their compilation; and as I ever did, I still continue to fix the price to every book that is sold in my shop, except such articles as are both bought and sold again while I am out of town. (*M.*, p. 397)

The care put into the crafting of the catalogues, together with the expense involved in promoting his business through these documents, illustrates just how important they were to Lackington. They often provided the only point of contact for readers selecting and purchasing books from a distance. A good example of this is Thomas Jefferson, who used the bookseller, John Stockdale, as an agent to acquire books for him from Lackington.² We know that these catalogues were particularly hefty since they occasioned a complaint in the House of Lords when Lackington was charged with abusing Post Office Franking privileges. A report in the *St James's Chronicle* recorded that 'Lackington the Bookseller's weighty

² See Eric Stockdale, *'Tis Treason, My Good Man!: Four Revolutionary Presidents and a Piccadilly Bookshop* (London and New Castle: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2005), p. 168.

Catalogues had gone, by means of his friends in Publick Offices, to all parts of the country under Franked Covers'.³

The catalogues also provided valuable information for buyers visiting a shop as large as Lackington's where it was difficult to browse amongst the high shelves. One author, George Thompson, describes the towering galleries of books which overwhelmed him during a visit to the Temple of the Muses:

Arriv'd at the bottom, I order some books: but was surprised that they had to climb to the first and second Gallery, more than once, before my books could be found. Sublime books claim an elevated station. Poetry, as being most aerial naturally soars.⁴

His description makes clear that customers were required to order books which were then retrieved by shopmen (see Figure 8).

Not all of Lackington's catalogues have survived, but, those existing today chart the relationship between buyer and seller and the development of the business.⁵ It appears that Lackington found them to be a useful indicator of growth. They provided him with reassurance that his strategies were succeeding for we learn from the *Memoirs* that his decision to refuse credit resulted in a huge increase in sales, 'so that my Catalogues in the year seventeen hundred and eighty-four, were very much augmented in size' (*M.*, p. 368). The first in that year contained twelve thousand volumes and the second, thirty thousand volumes. He communicated this success to his customers via the title pages of the catalogues and also in newspaper advertising. The number of volumes for sale was displayed on the title pages of subsequent catalogues so that the *Second Part of Lackington's Catalogue for 1787* informs prospective buyers that it contains

³ See 'Postscript: House of Peers' in *St James's Chronicle*, 13 April 1795.

⁴ George Thompson, *A Sentimental Tour* (Penrith: Anthony Soulby, 1798), p. 161.

⁵ The British Library holds the largest collection of catalogues for Lackington and for Lackington and Allen with volumes for 1784, 1787 (2nd part), 1788 (2nd part), 1789, 1792 (parts 1 and 2), 1793 (2nd part) for J. Lackington, 1793 (2nd part) for Lackington and Allen, 1796, 1797, 1798 and others dating from the time following Lackington's retirement.

Figure 8: Showing the Expansive interior of the Temple of the Muses

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'about Thirty Thousand Volumes', while the *Second Volume of Lackington's Catalogue for 1788* boasts 'above thirty thousand volumes'. By 1792, however, *Lackington's Catalogue for 1792* advertises 'One Hundred Thousand Volumes'. These figures do not necessarily tally with the number of items listed in the respective catalogues. The 1784 catalogue lists 10,034 items, whilst the 1792 catalogue lists 18,433 items – an increase but not of the scale claimed. Some of these items, however, consist of more than one volume which might help to account for Lackington's figures. The title pages of his catalogues, like his *Memoirs*, were part of a broad scheme to publicise the bookshop and draw public attention to its steady growth over the years.

Lackington was aware of the power of publicity from his earliest days as a bookseller. He advertised his catalogues in newspapers and, again, drew attention to his expanding business. An advertisement placed in the *Gazette and New Daily Advertiser* on Saturday 13 March, 1779 alerted readers to a 'catalogue of several valuable libraries and collections of Books' offered by Lackington and Denis. In the 1780s advertisements tend to appear around the same time as the release of new catalogues in the spring and autumn. By the end of the decade, Lackington increased the number of advertisements and broadened the range of publications they appeared in. We find examples in newspapers such as the *London Chronicle*, the *London Evening Post*, the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Oracle Bell's New World*.⁶ From 1791 the Lackington presence in the press was augmented by notices drawing attention to the publication of his *Memoirs* and by 1793, there was rarely a week which did not see an advertisement for either catalogues, new editions of the *Memoirs*, or notices about 'Books Extremely

⁶ See 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspaper <http://find.galegroup.com>.

Cheap' being offered for sale. Readers were regularly alerted to the bargains available in Chiswell Street.⁷

Further notices appeared on a regular basis and again, we find a discrepancy between the number of volumes said to be available for sale in advertisements, the figures quoted on the title pages of catalogues, and the actual number of items listed in each catalogue. In 1781, an advertisement boasts of 25,000 volumes available in a new catalogue, considerably more than the twelve thousand which Lackington estimated in his *Memoirs* that he had in stock by 1784. Readers are promised books 'chiefly in English, a great number in French, many in Latin, Greek, &c, including various modern publications many in elegant bindings.' If this appears to appeal to wealthier, better educated readers of foreign languages desiring 'elegant' books, the advertisement also draws attention to 'scarce old books and many thousand pamphlets the whole selling at the remarkably low prices which are printed in the catalogue by J. Lackington'.⁸

Lackington continued his 'volume inflation' in all his advertising, promising a wealth of reading matter for his customers. The thirty thousand volumes found on the 1784 title page become forty thousand in advertisements appearing at the time.⁹ By 1788, it is fifty thousand, and by 1790, seventy thousand.¹⁰ Between 1790 and 1793 Lackington alternates the headings for his advertisements, sometimes promoting 'Books Remarkably Cheap' and sometimes

⁷ For example, see *Morning Chronicle*, 4 April 1793; *St James's Chronicle*, 9 April; *Star*, 11 April; *Morning Chronicle*, 12 April; *London Chronicle*, 16 April; *St James's Chronicle*, 21 May; *Sun*, 22 May; *World*, 25 May and 31 May, *General Evening Post* and *Sun*, 6 June; *True Briton*, 10 June; *St James's Chronicle*, 11 June; etc.

⁸ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 8 Feb, 1781.

⁹ See *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 18 November, 1784.

¹⁰ See advertisements for the 1788 Catalogue in *General Evening Post*, 16 October 1787 and in *Public Advertiser*, 25 October, 1787; and for advertisements promoting catalogues with 90,000 volumes available, see the *World*, 10 September, 1790, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 16 September, 1790 and *English Chronicle and Universal Evening Post*, 12 October, 1790,

Figure 9: An example of one of Lackington's business cards

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drawing attention to 'Books 100,000 volumes'.¹¹ By February 1794 this figure rises to 200,000 volumes and even after the move to the splendid new site, the Temple of the Muses, all advertisements emphasise 'Cheap Books' or even 'Books Extremely Cheap' (see Figure 9).¹² Lackington maintains a strong association between the sheer quantity of books he handled and the very low prices he charged for them and he takes pains to reinforce this message in all media available to him.

Presenting book buying to new markets

The *Memoirs*, contemporary newspaper advertising, and the various remaining catalogues produced by Lackington, all illustrate a consistent aim on the part of the bookseller to reach out to as many readers as possible with the offer of large stock and low prices. His catalogues convey his trading ethos in the care put into their compilation, their wording and their presentation. Robert Darnton emphasises how all the bibliographic codes embedded in a book's production can speak to readers:

In order to make sense of a book, we must find our way through a dense symbolic field; for everything about a book bears the mark of cultural conventions – not just the language in which it is written, but its typography, layout, format, binding, and even the advertising used to sell it. Each of these elements orients the reader, directing his or her response.¹³

The same is no less true of the catalogues which Lackington disseminated in order to sell books.

¹¹ For example, see *St James Chronicle*, 15 October 1793 and *London Chronicle*, 17 October 1793.

¹² See, *Star*, 27 February, 1794, *Morning Chronicle*, 27 November, 1795, and *Lloyds Evening Post*, 4 January, 1796.

¹³ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, pp. 186–7.

These documents resemble many other non-auction booksellers' catalogues of the late eighteenth century. They were produced as octavo volumes, each containing a title page, an index showing buyers the various categories of books available, together with their formats. This was followed by itemised and numbered entries providing information about the author, the title, a brief description of the state of the book, the year of publication and the price. What particularly characterises Lackington's catalogues is the unusually 'busy' appearance of his title pages. Most booksellers' catalogues of the time are presented as advertising documents. The design of many contemporary title pages owes much to handbills in their attempt to convey a large amount of commercial information in a relatively small space. Most, however, are much simpler in appearance than Lackington's. His title pages display an assortment of typefaces, a range of font sizes, interspersing capitals with upper and lower case, and employing bold and italic fonts to emphasise key commercial ideas.

Lackington's Catalogue for 1784 is the earliest of his catalogues to have survived (see Figure 10). It dates to a time when Lackington was sole owner of the business, based in 46 Chiswell Street, and it was produced midway through his career as a bookseller. What immediately strikes the reader when glancing at the title page of this catalogue is Lackington's name, the title, and the year. After taking in these important features, the eye of the curious reader is not directed to any one item. A mass of information vies for attention, all organised in categories presented in a huge variety of different sizes and fonts. A neat line of small capitals describes the elegant bindings of the best editions of modern publications offered. We learn there are 'Also many *Scarce*, OLD BOOKS.'; that '*Not an*

Figure 10: Title page for Lackington's Catalogue, 1784

Figure 11: Title page for the almanac, *Vox Stellarum*

Figure 12: Title pages for *The Garland of Good-Will* and *The Book of Knowledge*

Figure 13: Simpler ‘classical’ style of title pages for William Bent’s and Thomas Payne’s Catalogues.

Figure 14: Title page of Lackington, Allen & Co.'s *Catalogue Volume the First: Michaelmas 1796 to September 1797*

Hour's Credit will be given to any Person, nor any Books sent over Sea, or into the Country before they are paid for', etc.

Lackington's method of arranging information is very similar to that used by the producers of almanacs such as *Vox Stellarum Or A Loyal Almanack for the year of Human Redemption M DCC LXXXV* (see Figure 11). Here, as in Lackington's catalogue, the title dominates the title page whilst an array of detail is organised using a selection of different type faces. This free use of different types can also be found in popular pamphlets, chapbooks and volumes sold for distribution by chapmen and other travelling salesmen. Titles such as *The Garland of Good-Will*, possibly printed in 1710, and *The Book of Knowledge*, printed in 1758, exhibit similar varied use of type to separate classes of information they wish to impart (see Figure 12).¹⁴ This style of presentation is more characteristic of the seventeenth and the earlier part of the eighteenth centuries as *The Garland of Good-Will* with its mixture of black letter, roman and italic, illustrates.

The style of Lackington's catalogues is notably distinct from that of booksellers such as William Bent or Thomas Payne which aspire to a more austere, classical appearance (see Figure 13). Even his later catalogues, produced after the move to Finsbury Square, show unashamedly cluttered title pages (see Figure 14). Lackington and Allen & Co.'s *Catalogue, Volume the First, Michaelmas 1796 to September 1797*, probably the last produced whilst James Lackington was in charge of the Temple of the Muses, presents a title page displaying a list of hard-to-find books recently acquired from 'valuable libraries'. These lists resemble those appearing in some of Lackington's newspaper

¹⁴ Both of these books could be bought from J. Bew, Paternoster Row and were advertised in *A Catalogue of Chapmen's Books* (London: Bew, 1778).

advertisements under headings drawing attention to the large number of volumes offered or 'Books extremely cheap'.¹⁵ The emphasis may have shifted to draw attention to the huge choice presented to customers in the magnificent new book emporium, but Lackington's old fashioned, informal catalogue style still reflects his understanding of the anxiety experienced by those unused to buying books. As we have seen in Chapter 2, he and Jones avoided bookshops and when relating his feelings of shame at not knowing what to buy, Lackington makes it clear in his *Memoirs* that the problem remained widespread:

I assure you, my friend, that there are thousands now in England in the very same situation: many, very many have come to my shop, who have discovered an enquiring mind, but were totally at a loss what to ask for, and who had no friend to direct them. (*M.*, pp. 152–3)

By presenting new readers with catalogues reminiscent of familiar publications such as chapbooks or almanacs, Lackington offers them the guiding hand of such a friend and this guidance is evident too when one looks at the contents.

Making a selection and reading the contents

Once they had turned the title page, readers of Lackington's catalogues could browse the various types of books offered via the 'index' or table of contents. The index from the 1784 catalogue illustrates the enormous range of genres and subjects which Lackington stocked and it reveals an attempt to offer something to suit the tastes of all readers. The catalogue was organised according to the headings of the index, and each section was subdivided by the size of books.

Figure 15 illustrates the layout of the Index. The reader gleans a little information about each book or print, such as its scarcity, sometimes how it is bound, the price charged and, from this, can make their selection. This page

¹⁵ See pp. 178–79.

**Figure 15: Index Page to Lackington’s 1784 Catalogue showing the
table of contents and items for sale**

alone reveals the range of customers for whom Lackington sought to provide books. A sixty-eight volume edition of Johnson's *English Poets* can be bought for more than five pounds, a considerable sum, whereas a few pence can buy a map or a print.

Further examination of the first very broad heading, 'History, Antiquities, Voyages, Travels, Miscellanies, Novels, and Romances, &c', yields some interesting results and tells us a little more about the types of books stocked. It is significant that Lackington promises customers 'scarce old books' on the title page. There are indeed many items marked 'scarce' as well as many old books and this often influenced the price. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, St Clair has argued that monopoly-owning publishers tended to exploit the full potential of their products by offering a limited number of higher priced formats to the wealthiest buyers before moving down the demand curve in stages, offering lower prices in greater numbers and smaller formats. He calls this practice 'tranching down'.¹⁶

The following table represents an analysis of the percentage of each format of book produced in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in Lackington's 1784 Catalogue.

	16 th Century	17 th Century	18 th Century
Folio	1%	58%	41%
Quarto	1%	24%	75%
Octavo		14.6%	85.4%
12mo		12.2%	87.8%

As we can see, a larger proportion of folio volumes date from the seventeenth century. Of the 41% produced in the eighteenth century, most date from the earlier decades.

¹⁶ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 32.

These figures raise the question whether, as St Clair suggests, old books were in fact cheaper. After having appealed to poorer readers through the comfortably familiar presentation of the catalogues, just how inexpensive were Lackington's books? I have, again, examined the category 'History &c' in the 1784 catalogue and tried to analyse what proportion of older and newer books might be considered expensive. In order to do this, I have sorted the contents of the folio, quarto, octavo and duodecimo categories into books costing more than 5s and those costing less than 5s (the price of Lackington's *Memoirs*). Even though 5s would have represented a considerable outlay for many less wealthy readers, I have taken it as an average cost of a new book.¹⁷ I have then sorted these books by date of publication, noting those produced in the seventeenth century, in the early part of the eighteenth century and more recent works. In some instances dates were not available.

	Total number	% over 5s	% of which produced post 1750	% under 5s	% of which produced in C17	% of which produced 1700–1750
Folio	328	30%	35%	70%	68%	21%
Quarto	288	19%	82%	81%	25%	21%
Octavo	886	12%	70%	88%	13%	36%
12mo	770	12%	92%	88%	12%	13%

These figures support St Clair's thesis, showing that the proportion of folio books priced at more than 5s (30%) was greater than the equivalent proportions of other formats. Approximately 98 folio items and 106 octavo items fall into this category. A greater number of cheaper folio books tend to date from the seventeenth century. Most of the more expensive quarto, octavo and duodecimo volumes were produced after 1750. There are few smaller format books produced before 1750. What is striking when analysing the hundreds of entries in this

¹⁷ St Clair notes that few working-class readers such as journeymen, tradesmen, farm workers, factory workers, and domestic servants earned as much as 10s per week. (p. 195)

category is the vast number of books which could be acquired for less than 1s 6d. Whilst one can find examples of Bibles, Histories and complete sets of neatly bound popular volumes costing over 1l, Lackington offered hundreds of volumes for 1s or less.¹⁸ These include odd volumes such as 'Historical List of Horse Matches', from 1753 to 1768 which could be bought as a set (although 'not quite bound alike') for 8s or singly for 9d each, 'Bolingbroke's 14 Letters to Swift,' for 6d, 'Seneca's Morals, by L'Estrange' for 1s 6d or 1s, or 'Epicurus's Morals' for 1s or 6d.¹⁹ These last two items are mentioned by Lackington as being particularly important in his own education (*M.*, p. 168).

These figures suggest that Lackington was well aware of the constraints facing poorer readers and offered a broad selection of works to appeal to this group. We find examples in his catalogues of his efforts to guide the inexperienced shopper and proffer books which might appeal to them. Acting as the 'friend' he wished had been available to help him in his own book-buying adventures as a young man, Lackington uses valuable catalogue space to print the long titles of works which might attract new readers. One entry, George Fisher's *The Instructor or Young Man's Best Companion*, (1786) fills approximately a quarter of one page of the *Second Volume of Lackington's Catalogue for 1793*.

This reads:

8059 Fisher's Young Man's Best Companion, containing Spelling, Reading, Writing, and Arithmatic, in an easier Way than any yet published, Instructions to Write Variety of Hands, &c. Description of the Product, Counties, and Market Towns England and Wales, List of

¹⁸ See item 25 'new Complete Family Bible, large print, with cuts, notes, and Illustrations, 2 vol. good as new, 1l 10s 6d' (p. 3); item 204 'Henry on the Bible, the last London Edition, 5 vol. well bound & gilt, 5l 5s (p. 7); or costly Histories such as item 2374, 'Rollin's ancient History, 7 vol. — his Roman History, 10 vols — his Arts and Sciences, 3 vol. — his Belle Lettres, 3 vol. in all 23 vols with cuts, new, uniformly bound, calf, gilt, 6l 9s' (p. 50); or item 2384 'Rapin's History of England, and Tindall's Continuation, with cuts, large print, 28 vols gilt, 4l 4s' (p. 50).

¹⁹ See *Lackington's Catalogue for 1784* (London: Lackington, 1784): 'Historical List of Horse Matches', p. 61; 'Bolingbroke's Letters', p. 56; 'Seneca's Morals', p. 51; and 'Epicurus's Morals', p. 39.

the English and Scottish Fairs, Method of Measuring Carpenters, Joiners, Sawyers, Bricklayers, Plasterers, Plumbers, Masons, Glaziers, and Painters Work, how to undertake each Work, and at what Price, the Rates of each Commodity, and the Common Wages of Journeymen, with the Description of Gunter's Line, and Coggeshall's Sliding Rule, Gauging made easy, Dialling, and how to erect and fix Dials, Instructions for Dying, Colouring and making Colours, Gardening for every Month. Also the Family's Best Companion, and Geography, Astronomy, Interest Tables, &c. *new and neat* 1s7d each.
— 1786.²⁰

This work was aimed at artisans. It could be used as a tool to learn to read and write and so it was very much in Lackington's interests to promote it and so expand the market of readers and potential customers. Not all booksellers stocked such manuals and some, such as Thomas Payne, simply gave the short title of the work. Prices varied, with some booksellers charging as much as 2s. 6d, most selling it for 2s, whilst Lackington offered it for 1s. 3d.²¹ Lackington seems to have made a deliberate effort to nurture newer, working-class readers, by his generous use of catalogue space. Perhaps he recognised the significant sacrifice required by these readers to make such purchases. St Clair observes that in the early nineteenth century skilled workers such as printers and carpenters were paid between about 25 and 36 shillings a week, whilst lawyers' clerks in London might expect to receive around 10 shillings and only a few 'jouneymen, tradesmen, farm workers, factory workers, domestic servants, and the rest of the employed population who had to provide for families as well as for themselves . . . earned as much as 10 shillings a week'.²² By 1796/7, since the catalogues had grown to include greater numbers of volumes, Lackington added new categories to his Index which directed customers to books dealing with practical skills such as

²⁰ *Second Volume of Lackington's Catalogue for 1793* (London: Lackington, 1793), p. 251.

²¹ John Anderson charged 2s. 6d in his *Catalogue* of 1790, as did Shepperson and Reynolds in their *A Catalogue of the Library of an Eminent Divine* in 1789 and Lunn offered a new copy in 1792 for 2s. 6d as well as another copy priced at 1s. Thomas Vernor (1789), Theophilus Thornton (1785), John Manson (1791), J. Deighton (1791), and William Carter (1785) all charged 2s. Lackington offered Fisher's manual at 1s. 3d., and a new copy at 1s. 9d in his *Catalogue for 1784*.

²² St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 195.

Figure 16: The impact of the long title of *The History of Women* on the page layout of Lackington's Catalogue.

'Farriery', 'Husbandry', 'Planting and Gardening', 'Trade', etc. Customers could still find a 'Young Man's Companion' priced at 1s. Lackington also continued to use the long titles of certain publications to draw attention to particular items.

It was not just poor artisan readers, however, whom Lackington sought to attract through the presentation of his catalogues. In Chapters 4 and 5 we have seen how he appealed to female readers in his *Memoirs*. In order to satisfy the 'taste for books' which he recognised amongst the female population, he appears to have stocked works which might have attracted them (*M.*, p. 423). In his 1792 Catalogue, he offers readers William Alexander's *History of Women* (1779), to which he devotes almost half a page (see Figure 16). He promotes this work by including the long title in the same way that he drew attention to Fisher's *Young Man's Best Companion*.

This entry makes an immediate impact on the eye of the casual browser when compared with other items listed on the same page. Margaret Schotte writes about an earlier bookseller, William London, who owned a shop in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the seventeenth century. In an age in which title pages served much the same purpose as today's 'blurbs', London insisted on always giving the long titles of books in his *A Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books in England*. He believed that by providing all the information contained in these titles 'all books [were] brought to you lying open' so that he could give readers 'a walking Library'.²³ Lackington is more selective in his use of long titles, tending to use them when he felt that particular readers needed guidance, but it is interesting that, again, we find him resorting to old-fashioned approaches to readers he felt may have been less familiar with book-buying. In the 1792

²³ Margaret Schotte, "'Books for the Use of the Learned and Studious": William London's *Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books*' in *Book History*, 11 (2008), 33–57 (p. 37).

catalogue, he also includes other long titles such as *The Laws respecting Women, as they regard their natural Rights, or their Connections and Conduct as Daughters, Wards, Heiresses, Spinsters, Sisters, Wives, Widows, Mothers, Legatees, Executixes, Parent and Child, Minors, &c. with a great Variety of curious and important Decisions in different Courts and the Substance of the Duchess of Kingston's Trial for Bigamy &c.*²⁴

Few late eighteenth-century booksellers' catalogues devote so much space to single items. Lackington also appears to have been unusual in inserting asides to his readers in the main body of his catalogues. We find one example of this in the 1792 catalogue, urging women to buy John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, a work he refers to in the *Memoirs*:

(N.B. Every lady in Europe should read this Book, and particularly young Ladies.)²⁵

A little later, in the same catalogue, he appears to prick the more prurient interests of readers in the following entry:

Loyola, alias Henrietta, a Novel (*This Novel is obscene, and endeavours to prove that Chastity in either Sex is no Virtue, that Women should be common &c.* crown octavo, (*Same as is sold at 3s 6d*) new, neatly bound, 2s ——— 1784.²⁶

The novel in question describes the predatory sexual impulses of its eponymous heroine, but it is not explicitly sexual. The catalogue lists three further copies of the text including one 'gilt and marbled' for 2s. 6d. Lackington continued to address his customers directly in his catalogues. The 1796/7 catalogue contains several such asides. For example 'Bannister's View of Arts and Sciences', priced at 1s 8d, is brought to readers' attention with the following:

²⁴ Lackington, *Lackington's Catalogue for 1792* (London: Lackington, 1792), p. 206

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.100.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.106.

*N.B. This useful, entertaining, and instructive Book, treats of the Architecture — Astronomy — Language — Mythology — Natural and Moral Philosophy of the Ancients, (same that is sold in boards at 3s 6d).*²⁷

Lackington was also one of relatively few booksellers who drew attention to 'Novels and Romances' in his catalogues. As we know, Lackington had championed the novel in his *Memoirs*. Some booksellers, such as Samuel Hayes, Thomas King and Henry Chapman, sold these books under the sub-heading 'Miscellanies'.²⁸ Lackington is unashamed in his classification of English Twelves for sale under 'History, Antiquities, Biography, Voyages and Travels, Natural History, Novels, Romances, Miscellanies, &c'.

His wife, Dorcas, was particularly fond of novels so this may have been part of his strategy to draw in female customers. He also claims that novels were popular with all classes of readers, writing in the *Memoirs* that 'poor country people' were in the habit of hanging copies of *Tom Jones* from their bacon racks or reading *Pamela* whilst riding to market (*M.*, pp. 420–21). This seems unlikely, however, since both of these works are surprisingly expensive with *Pamela* costing 10s 6d and *Tom Jones*, between 6s and 7s in the 1784 catalogue. Each would have been far beyond the reach of the poor country people he mentions, even in the 'cheapest' bookshop in the world.

²⁷ Lackington, Allen & Co., *Catalogue, Volume the First, Michaelmas 1796 to September 1797* (London: Lackington & Allen, 1796), p. 47.

²⁸ For example, see Samuel Hayes, 'Miscellanies and Poetry. Duodecimo', *A Catalogue of a Numerous and Valuable Collection of Books* (London: Hayes, 1787), pp. 168–185; Thomas King, 'History, Miscellanies and Translations. Duodecimo', *A Catalogue of Books* (London: King, 1788), pp. 114–126; and Henry Chapman, 'Miscellanies', *A Catalogue of Books* (London: Chapman, 1793), pp. 99–106.

The Lackington brand

Lackington relied upon two articles of commercial faith in order to provide the cheapest books to his customers and so promote reading amongst the broadest swathes of society. So important were these to his success that he incorporated them into his business identity, bringing them to the attention of his customers and readers of his *Memoirs* and catalogues alike. Again and again he emphasises his decision to allow 'not an hour's credit' to any person, and his very low prices and small profits. He explains each of these in detail in his *Memoirs*, commenting on his determination to refuse credit:

I had observed that where credit was given, most bills were not paid within six months, many not within a twelvemonth, and some not within two years. Indeed, many tradesmen have accounts of seven years standing; and some bills are never paid. The losses sustained by the interest of money in long credits, and by those bills that were not paid at all; the inconveniences attending not having the ready-money to lay out in trade to the best advantage, together with the great loss of time in keeping accounts, and collecting debts, convinced me, that if I could but establish a ready-money business *without any exceptions*, I should be enabled to sell every article very cheap. (*M.*, pp. 362–63)

As this passage suggests, he was vociferous in his insistence that he would make no exceptions to this rule. Every catalogue was inscribed with the notice:

Not an Hour's Credit will be given to any Person, nor any Books sent on board Ships, or into the Country before they are paid for.²⁹

Lackington describes the reaction of friends and acquaintances who ridiculed his presumption in appearing to discourage business. In fact the refusal to give credit was not such a novel idea and many booksellers' catalogues explicitly stated that they would only take ready money. Examples include Thomas King, Samuel Hayes, John Binns, William Lowndes, John Simco, Thomas Vernor, and George Wagstaff.³⁰

²⁹ *Second Part of Lackington's Catalogue for 1787* (London: Lackington, 1787), title page.

³⁰ See Thomas King's *A Catalogue of Books*, 1785, Samuel Hayes' *A Catalogue of Books*, 1784, John Binns' *A Catalogue of Books for 1795*, Wagstaff's *Catalogue for 1776*, T. Lowndes's

Lackington is careful to explain this astute and practical business practice to his readers in terms which present it in the best light. He 'sells' it to customers as a strategy calculated to maintain the very lowest prices. He also sought to keep prices low by buying up stocks of remaindered books which could be sold on to his customers at low prices. Again, he reasons that this would allow him to bring reading matter within the reach of those of limited means. He argues that 'thousands . . . have been effectually prevented from purchasing, (though anxious to do so) whose circumstances in life would not permit them to pay the full price, and thus were totally excluded from the advantage of improving their understandings, and enjoying a rational entertainment' (*M.*, p. 377).

Once again, this policy was not in fact unique to Lackington. Leacroft drew attention to his purchase of the remaining copies of *The Antiquities of Herculanum*, noting that 'having purchased the remaining Copies of this Work, and so *greatly sunk the Original Price*, he hopes the Purchase of it will be no longer confined to the Learned and Curious among the Rich.'³¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites an earlier example of this practice in a definition of the word 'remainder' pertaining to the book-trade taken from the *Monthly Review* of September 1757: 'C. Henderson, Bookseller under the Royal Exchange, having purchased the remainder of the impression of the following very entertaining book . . . proposes to sell them for 4s only'. Both Leacroft and Lackington justified this sound commercial practice by appearing to benefit poorer readers. Lackington claimed to have been 'highly instrumental in diffusing that general desire for READING, now so prevalent among the inferior orders of society' (*M.*, p. 377).

Catalogue for 1774, John Simco's *A Catalogue of Books and Prints* (London: for the author, 1788), *T. Vernor's Catalogue for 1789*.

³¹ S. Leacroft, *A Catalogue of a Capital Collection of Books* (London: Leacroft, 1775), p. 3.

In a further move to rally the support of customers and readers, he addressed them directly in the second volume of his 1793 catalogue:

It is with the utmost Gratitude to his particular Customers, and the Public, that he acknowledges his Plan has succeeded far, very far, beyond his own self-flattering Expectations; and he believes his Customers in general will do him the Justice to declare, that the great Increase of Business has not caused him to neglect their Favours, or to advance his Prices; on the contrary, as his Sale has become more extensive, additional Assistants have been procured; and it is presumed, that Seventeen Persons more attentive and obliging are not to be found in any one Shop.³²

Whilst affirming his very low prices and excellent service, Lackington draws his customers and readers into the story of his success. During the same year that these words were included in the catalogue, he added considerably to his *Memoirs*, galvanising his efforts to extend his reach through a calculated attempt to publicise his shop and his services through his own life story.

As this passage demonstrates, catalogues could act as a newsletter to customers but as Lackington was well aware, he was not the only bookseller to communicate in this way. His claim to make small profits was challenged by rival shopman William Bingley, who used his own *Commission Catalogue* to pour scorn on Lackington, whom he accused of 'puffing'. Bingley urged all those looking to sell their libraries to avoid '*small profit Gentry*', asking pointedly 'how a carriage and horses, servants in Livery, country house, and an army of shopmen, can be supplied with *small profits only*'.³³

Distribution and Promotion

Lackington looked beyond the environs of Chiswell Street when planning his business. He writes in his *Memoirs* of the dearth of good bookshops he

³² Lackington, *Second Volume of Lackington's Catalogue for 1793* (London: Lackington, 1793), p.iii.

³³ William Bingley, *Bingley's Commission Catalogue for November 1793* (London: Bingley, 1793), p. 8.

encountered on his travels in 1787 to Edinburgh 'by the way of York, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, &c' and his return via 'Glasgow, Carlisle, Leeds, Lancaster, Preston, Manchester, and other considerable places' (*M.*, p. 459):

I was much surprised, as well as disappointed, at meeting with very few of the works of the most esteemed authors; and those few consisted in general of ordinary editions, besides an assemblage of common trifling books, bound in sheep, and that too in a very bad manner. (*M.*, p. 459)

It suited his purposes to draw attention to the poor quality of regional booksellers compared to those in London since, during the late 1780s and early 1790s, he was extending his reach across the country. David Allan observes that some regional subscription libraries kept copies of the catalogues of the large London booksellers in order to browse for future purchases. He writes that Luddenden Library held Lackington's catalogue for this purpose, describing it as 'the ultimate guide to large-scale metropolitan bookselling'.³⁴

As already mentioned, Lackington's stock increased significantly throughout this period as did his advertising in newspapers and journals.³⁵ During 1792 the *Memoirs* were vigorously promoted. Between February and April, he switched the focus to the new catalogue, whilst still reminding readers that his *Memoirs* were also available. The advertisements, like the titles pages of the catalogues themselves, draw attention to the size of the stock, the elegance of the books' bindings, the utmost value given to sellers for parcels of books as well as the number of cheap books and scarce old books.³⁶

³⁴ David Allan, *A Nation of Readers*, p. 87.

³⁵ Lackington's advertisements can be found in the *Public Advertiser*, *Lloyds Evening Post*, *London Chronicle*, *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, *St James Chronicle or British Evening Post*, *Morning Herald*, *E. Johnson's Bristol Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, *Star*, *Morning Chronicle*, *London Recorder or Sunday Gazette*, *World and General Evening Post*.

³⁶ See *Morning Herald*, 7 March 1792, issue 4061.

Lackington also draws public attention to the number of places his catalogues may be acquired. Readers could find them in London at the shop, at a private house in Charles Street, St James's Square, and at Marsom, a bookseller at 187 High Holborn. Lackington's reach extended beyond London via booksellers across the country such as Hazard in Bath, Merrick or Palmer in Oxford, Gander or Hodges in Sherborne, Rollason in Coventry, Deck in Bury, Haydon in Plymouth, Edwards in Norwich, Bulgin in Bristol, Fisher in Newcastle and Freeth's Coffee House in Birmingham.³⁷ By 1793 the list was extended to include bookshops in Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin as well. Lackington offered cheap books to readers throughout the nation and beyond. As already mentioned, Thomas Jefferson asked bookseller John Stockdale to send books to Paris for him which were bought from Lackington. He sent instructions making arrangements to pay for the order, apparently undaunted by Lackington's refusal to allow credit:

Besides this I wish to receive from Lackington, Chiswell Street, those stated on the next leaf, so far as they remain unsold. As my friend, Colo. Smith is absent from London and Lackington gives no credit, will you be so good as to procure from him the books, send them with the others, and pay him for them, for which I will duly account with you.³⁸

In 1793 we find lists of books promoted by Lackington under headings such as 'Books Extremely Cheap'. One such advertisement which appeared in the *Morning Post* on 16 October 1793 states:

Lackington and Allen are now selling the following BOOKS at their shop, No 46 and 47 Chiswell-street, Moorfields, at the following low Prices, most of which are much less than half the Publication Prices, and all are in Boards, except otherwise expressed.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Quoted in Eric Stockdale, *'Tis Treason, My Good Man!: Four Revolutionary Presidents and a Piccadilly Bookshop*, p. 168.

There follows a list of seventy-six titles including works by Pope, Spenser, Johnson and Shakespeare, dictionaries, anthologies and a range of other popular titles. Lackington's claim appears to have been accurate for he advertises 'Francklin's Translation of Sophocles's Tragedies, 8vo.' at 3s. 3d. or 'bound and lettered' at 4s. in this list. Joshua Cooke offered a new edition of this book in his 1793 catalogue for 6s. 6d., John Egerton advertised a new 'elegant' edition for 7s., whilst Thomas Payne had one 'new & very neat' for 7s.³⁹ In focusing upon popular titles in his advertisements, Lackington was not simply making these books available at a reduced price but reinforcing a literary canon by directing readers in their purchases. He was influencing what was read.

Conclusion

So what do Lackington's catalogues and advertisements tell us about the ways in which he sold books, and particularly how he promoted reading, to the common reader? We can see that his distinctive voice echoes as loudly in the catalogues and in advertising as it does in the *Memoirs*, reinforcing the impression that his autobiography was very much part of what we would now refer to as a publicity campaign. One of the most striking features of this campaign appears to have been the creation of an engaging personality, used to 'speak' to customers as a friend and a guide. Lackington appears to have been unusual amongst booksellers in recognising that some of his customers required such a figure to help them in their book-buying choices and we know that this valuable insight came from his own experience as a young man.

³⁹ Cooke, Joshua, *A Catalogue of Useful and Valuable Books* (Oxford: 1793), p. 53; Egerton, John, *A Catalogue of Books for MDCCXCIII* (London: 1793), p. 162; Payne, Thomas, *A Catalogue of a Select and Valuable Collection of Ancient and Modern Books* (London: 1792), p. 131.

One of the reasons that Lackington took such pains to sell his wares in this way was because he positioned his business deliberately at the lower end of the market as the 'Cheapest bookseller in the world' and he needed to develop new customers in order to boost sales.⁴⁰ As we have seen, however, he was careful not to alienate more affluent customers searching for a bargain or attracted by the range of stock which the claim of 200,000 available volumes seemed to promise. As earlier chapters have established, Lackington's own love of reading was heartfelt and appears to have provided the foundation for his business. He clearly understood the desire to possess books and to snap up a bargain which motivated his customers, as is evident from his rationale for selling rather than destroying, remaindered books:

Before I adopted this plan, great numbers of persons were very desirous of possessing some particular books, for which however (from various motives) they were not inclined to pay the original price; as some availed themselves of the opportunity of borrowing from a friend, or from a circulating library, or having read them though they held the works in esteem, might deem them too dear to purchase; or they might have a copy by them, which from their own and family's frequent use (or lending to friends) might not be in so good a condition as they could wish, though rather than purchase them again at the full price, they would keep those they had . . . (*M.*, p. 376).

It is because Lackington himself valued books so dearly that he was particularly astute at selling them to others. Evidence from his catalogues illustrates the many ways in which he aimed to bring books within reach of new readers who were served less effectively by other London booksellers.

⁴⁰ This claim was carved across the entrance to the Temple of the Muses. It was also included on Lackington's halfpenny trade tokens, see Longman, W., *Tokens of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longman, Green & Co, 1916), p. 35.

Chapter Seven

READING AND REVOLUTION

The story of Lackington's relationship with reading now takes another turn as this chapter and the next consider the final phase of his life. We find Lackington living in retirement in the country, in Alveston, near Bristol, and producing a new and very different account of his life in *The Confessions of J. Lackington*. This chapter will examine the social and political conditions which persuaded him to review his life. It considers the ways in which some in society, such as Edmund Burke, responded negatively to the increase in the number of readers in England, perceiving it as an assault by the lower classes on traditional values. It will assess Lackington's reaction to his own part in helping to spread literacy amongst poorer consumers and try to identify what it was that brought about the change in his attitude to literacy, which he had once seen as a tool for the laudable act of self-development, but now felt to be a threat to social order and even national security.

The Confessions was published in 1804. It includes 'Two Letters on the Bad Consequences of Having Daughters Educated at Boarding-Schools'.¹ As the title of these added letters suggests, it revokes many of the views which Lackington appears to have held dear in his *Memoirs*. No longer does he value a broad, secular education for men and women, rich and poor, attained through wide reading. At the dawn of the nineteenth century Lackington 'shudders' when he looks at his earlier autobiography, adding, 'I have wantonly treated of, and sported with the most solemn and precious truths of the gospel' (C., p. 185).

¹ I will treat *Two Letters* as part of *The Confessions*. These letters feature Lackington's friend or alter ego, Dick Thrifty, and are written in the style of the work to which they are affixed.

Nevertheless, there are many similarities between the two autobiographies. Each is presented to the reader as a series of letters, addressed to an unknown 'friend', and each is filled with quotations.² Unlike its predecessor, however, *The Confessions* has been largely ignored by scholars.³ It received cursory reviews and was severely abridged and tacked on to the *Memoirs* as an explanatory sequel when that work was republished as part of the *Autobiography* series in 1827.⁴ It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that because Lackington's attitudes towards readers and certain books had altered, his later work does not contain valuable insights into reading practices at the turn of the century.

The author announces the theme of *The Confessions* in one of two epigrams selected for the title page:

But then grew *Reason* dark, that *she* no more
 Could the fair forms of Good and Truth discern;
Bats they became, who *Eagles* were before,
 And this they got by their *desire to learn*.⁵

These lines, referring to Adam and Eve's fatal choice in the Garden of Eden, describe the consequences of mankind's desire for forbidden knowledge. This desire, according to Lackington, appeared still to be unabated as he wrote and 'infidelity', one of its effects, seemed to him to be spreading countrywide. However, he did not advocate the abandonment of reading as a solution to this national problem; on the contrary, he recommended books as fervently as ever, insisting that the right sort of books could restore religious values to the nation

² For details of the various English and American editions of *The Confessions*, see Chapter 1, pp. 38–40.

³ The work is not discussed in Altick's *The English Common Reader* or St Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*.

⁴ See reviews in *The Annual Review* 3 (1804) and *The Monthly Review* 45 (1804) and *The Gentleman's Magazine* 74 (1804). See also, *Autobiography: A Collection Of The Most Instructive And Amusing Lives Ever Published* v. XVIII (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1827).

⁵ Sir John Davies, *The Original, Nature, and Immortality of the Soul* (1697), first published in 1599 as *Nosce Teipsum* (or Know Thyself), quoted on the title page of *The Confessions*. Note that an error in the spelling of 'Batts' occurs in some copies of the first edition of this work.

and re-establish the moral order which he felt had been disturbed in earlier decades.

Contemporary commentators appear to have been surprised by Lackington's *volte face*:

These miscellanies of his own observations, with the sentiments of others, may be called the *experiences* and *conversion* of J. Lackington – very different from those of Jean-Jaques [sic] – and very different from his reflections when in business at London and now in retirement at Alveston – a *Methodist*!⁶

The *Monthly Review* treats the posture of repentance in *The Confessions* with some scepticism, noting that ‘true repentance is modest and unostentatious’ and ‘the judicious among the Methodists will not be much delighted with this sort of Confessions’.⁷ Lackington’s remorse appears to have been genuine, however, for he backed up his words with good works, preaching, and the construction of chapels.

Reading, Pestilence and the ‘Swinish Multitude’

In 1790, just a year before Lackington published his *Memoirs*, Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* appeared in bookshops. It became a best-seller, selling nineteen thousand copies within six months and going through eleven editions by September 1791.⁸ According to the author, this work was occasioned by an enquiry into his opinion of events in France by a friend in Paris. He is highly critical of events in France conducted with the approval of the National Assembly, particularly the assault on the Bastille prison and the murder of its governor.

⁶ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 74 (London: Nichols, 1804), p. 654.

⁷ *Monthly Review*, 45 (October 1804), 219–20.

⁸ See Leslie Mitchell’s Introduction to the Oxford World’s Classic edition of Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. vii. All further references to this work will be taken from this edition.

What is most interesting about Burke's reflections when considering Lackington's review of his life in *The Confessions* is what he had to say about the place of learning in society. As we shall see, one phrase in particular, the 'swinish multitude', was to provoke a furious response, but it is important to set this phrase within its fuller context. Burke wrote that:

Our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization . . . depended for ages upon two principles . . . the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy, the one by profession, the other by patronage, kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and confusions.⁹

Burke was deeply concerned that this tradition of learning was declining and that what he saw as the guardianship of knowledge by the Church and the nobility was being challenged with potentially disastrous consequences. Burke's insistence that it is for the ruling classes to protect learning is consistent with a Tory view that men were not all born equal or equally capable of heeding the lessons of reason.¹⁰ His reflections are shot through with fears of mob rule as witnessed in London during the Gordon Riots, and in France, in the aftermath of the Revolution:

Happy if learning, not debauched by ambition, had been satisfied to continue the instructor, and not aspired to be the master: Along with its natural protectors and guardians, learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.¹¹

At the time this was written, Lackington appears to have been vigorously opposed to Burke. In the *Memoirs*, he takes a very much more Whiggish line by saluting French 'liberty' and by quoting pro-revolutionary writers such as Robert Merry and Mary Wollstonecraft.¹² As Chapter 3 argues, his lists of free-thinking

⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 78–9.

¹⁰ See H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Methuen, 1979), pp. 270–318.

¹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 79.

¹² See Chapter 4, pp. 128–30.

authors and quotations from enlightenment thinkers appear to have been included in his *Memoirs* as a direct response to Burke.¹³ This thesis has demonstrated that during his years as a bookseller, he had worked to encourage poor readers to buy books and was very much part of the movement Burke identifies as opening the gates of knowledge to the 'swinish multitude' and breaking the monopoly on knowledge of the church and the nobility.

By 1804, however, Lackington appears to have adopted Burke's conservatism. He describes his study of free-thinking and philosophical works in very different terms from those used in his *Memoirs*. *The Life of John Bunche*, formerly greatly admired by him, is now a 'pernicious work' which not only 'eradicated the remains of Methodism, but also nearly the whole of Christianity' for him (C., p. 4). He writes of Voltaire's 'witty sarcasms and vile misrepresentations' which encouraged him to 'give up the Bible' entirely (C., pp. 4–5). Lackington then goes on to describe the movement of the semi-autobiographical figure 'Dick Thrifty' from a state of religious observance to atheism, a decline which is brought about through his reading of writers such as 'Chubb, Tyndal, Morgan, Collins, Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Bolingbroke, Hume, &c (C., p. 9).¹⁴ Whereas Burke casts these writers into 'lasting oblivion', asking who in 1790 actually read them, writing in 1803–4, Lackington perceives them to be the cause of the state of moral degeneration he sees in his earlier life and in the nation as a whole.¹⁵ Specifically, he charges them with leading him away from a path of learning through Bible reading directed by the Church.

¹³ See Chapter 3, p. 78

¹⁴ See Chapter 3, p. 71

¹⁵ See Burke, *Reflections*, p. 89. Evidence in the *Reading Experience Database* suggests that various works and letters of Bolingbroke were being read by readers such as Thomas Green, a gentleman and self proclaimed 'lover of literature' in 1798; William Windham, a former government minister, in 1809; and the Prince of Wales in 1818. See

Lackington cites the example of an acquaintance he calls 'Jack Jolly' who was persuaded to abandon religion and morality through his un-censored reading. Jolly is the 'son of a poor countryman in the North of England, who had contrived to have all his six or eight sons taught to read, write, and cast accounts' (C., p. 96). Whilst, in the *Memoirs*, this would have been a laudable act of ambitious parenting, in *The Confessions* it leads to vanity and dissolution. When he arrived in London, Jolly had 'acquired a taste in reading', beginning with penny pamphlets and old romances, progressing to plays and 'old English poets' before turning to 'controversy' (C., p. 96). He then sinks 'into one degree of infidelity after another until he became a downright atheist' (C., p. 98). Jolly then led Dick Thrifty and Lackington himself into 'infidelity'.

According to Lackington, it was not just Jolly's reading of authors who challenged accepted religious beliefs which turned his mind away from God, but reading itself. Lackington notes that his friend was 'acquainted with the best books in the English language, in various branches of literature'¹⁶:

His library contained the works of Chaucer, Spenser, Cowley, Waller, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gay, Young, Thomson, Prior, Addison, Swift, Halley, Hoole, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, Southcombe, Beaumont and Fletcher; Lee, Vanbrough, Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith, Locke, Reid, Beattie, Kaimes, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Buffon, Smellie, Smollet, Fielding, Le Sage, Cervantes, Chesterfield, Shaftesbury, Helvetius, Horace, Lucretius, Virgil, Homer, Cicero, Seneca, Thucydides, Smith, Blair, and Guthrie; he had also Dodsley's old plays, other collections of old plays, old romances, reviews, and various other books. (C., p. 99)

Jolly was so familiar with these works that he could 'turn to such passages as he occasionally wanted, and would frequently quote verbatim from memory' (C., p.

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading> [accessed 21 January 2013]. See *The First Volume of Lackington, Allen & Co.'s Catalogue, Michaelmas 1799* (London: Lackington & Allen, 1799) for examples of works by Bolingbroke (p.45), Collins (Deist) (pp. 50 and 446), Toland (p. 472), Tindal (p. 471), Chubb (pp. 296 and 444) and Morgan (p. 33) for sale at the end of the century.

¹⁶ Compare Lackington's list of those authors in Jolly's library with those quoted in the *Memoirs* and listed in Appendix B.

99). Tellingly, Jolly 'made such a progress in literary knowledge, that he was looked to as an oracle in the small circles of his acquaintance' and this 'flattered his vanity, and perhaps made him affect singularity'. This led Lackington to believe that Jolly, 'like Milton's devil, . . . would sooner rule in hell, than serve in heaven' (C., p. 99). Educational ambition is thus allied with Satan's ultimate rebellion against God.

The description of Jolly's extensive book collection and his familiarity with it, suggests that this character bore a strong resemblance to Lackington himself, although by noting Jolly's long illness and death, Lackington carefully distances his reformed self from this character. He writes in his Preface to *The Confessions* that he uses 'fictitious names' to refer to old acquaintances but many aspects of both Thrifty and Jolly reflect facets of his own life and character (C., p. vii). As we saw in *Memoirs* and is discussed in Chapter 5, Lackington fictionalises those parts of his former self he now critiques. He uses the figure of Jolly to condemn what he presents as the intellectual vanity and ambition he recognises in himself.

The process of self-improvement by reading is implicitly and explicitly condemned by Lackington throughout *The Confessions*. This is partly because he sees learning, as the example of Jack Jolly demonstrates, as leading away from religion and a firm moral foundation. Another writer penning a similar message is Martha Mary Sherwood, the author of *The History of Susan Gray*, a moral fable recommended by Lackington (C., p.163):

Books now becoming easy of access, and learning now taking a more universal spread, this great enemy of mankind began to fill men's hearts with a high conceit of their own mental powers; and in proportion as they exalted self, they despised their Maker. Many became infidels, despisers of all religion, vain talkers, inconsistent reasoners . . . filling the world with profane and blasphemous books.¹⁷

¹⁷ Mrs Sherwood, *A General Outline of Profane History*, pp. 213–5, quoted in M. Nancy Cutt, *Mrs Sherwood And Her Books For Children* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 11.

We find here another warning about the dire consequences of self-improvement or the temptation to 'exalt' the self.

The charge of 'vanity' which Lackington makes against Jolly, and which we find in Sherwood's accusation of 'high conceit', is echoed in the 'Two Letters', which discuss the dangers of educating daughters. Lackington condemns those who send their daughters to boarding schools making them '*would-be* ladies' (C., p. 200). He objects to the unrealistic expectations nurtured in these girls by their schooling which he claims will discourage them from accepting marriage offers from men of their own rank such as tradesmen and farmers. They are taught 'filigree' (delicate, ornamental stitching) rather than plain work in sewing lessons and lose the habit of industry (C., p. 204). Education is, again, raising the ambitions of these girls beyond the bounds imposed by their birth. They are presented as a threat to the social order and sexually predatory in their hunt for wealthy husbands.¹⁸

For readers of the *Memoirs*, what is perhaps most surprising about Lackington's assault on these schools is that he cites the reading of novels as one example of the worthless pursuits enjoyed by these girls. He notes that these daughters become embarrassed by their parents' humble station, expect to be waited on, and demand 'a servant several times a week to exchange novels at the circulating library' (C., p. 203). If this does not serve to horrify his readers, Lackington adds in his next letter that 'obscene books find their way into these seminaries' (C., p. 210). After praising novels in his *Memoirs* for providing 'a more genuine history of Man . . . than is sometimes to be found under the more

¹⁸ One such young woman 'traps' a notorious rake into marrying her in Gretna Green and is afterwards shunned by polite society, p. 206.

respectable titles of History, Biography, &c', we find in *The Confessions* that he is repeating a common warning amongst conservative writers about the dangers of exciting the imaginations of women and the young (*M.*, pp. 401–2). St Clair cites numerous instances of such cautions including Thomas Gisborne's declaration that novels are addictive and 'the appetite becomes too keen to be denied, and . . . the heart is secretly corrupted'.¹⁹ The unsupervised reading of these works was, in itself, a cause for concern, observes St Clair, since it removed young women from the social control of their families.²⁰ William Cowper voices the fear that writers of novels encouraged sexual transgression by referring to them as 'pimps' who 'steal to the closet of young innocence'.²¹ Paul Keen quotes from an article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* which again describes the harmful effects of novel reading on impressionable female minds:

A young woman, who employs her time in reading novels, will never find amusement in any other sort of books. Her mind will be soon debauched by licentious description, and lascivious images; and she will, consequently, remain the same frivolous and insignificant creature through life; her mind will become a magazine of trifles and follies, or rather impure and wanton ideas. Her favourite novels will never teach her the social virtues, the qualifications of domestic life, the principles of her native language, history, geography, morality, the precepts of Christianity, or any other useful science.²²

The implication of this passage is that there is little difference between the effect of reading a novel and any obscene publication. The objections penned by the correspondent, 'Eusebius', are very similar to those given by Lackington.

The reader of *The Confessions* has already been made aware of the dangers of novel reading, well before encountering these passages in the 'Two Letters'.

¹⁹ Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), p. 119, quoted in St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 283.

²⁰ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 282.

²¹ William Cowper, 'The Progress of an Error' (London: Johnson, 1782), p. 64. Lackington quotes from this work on p. 4 of *The Confessions*.

²² *The Gentleman's Magazine*, cited in Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 135.

Lackington begins the first letter of his later autobiography by placing blame for his movement away from religion firmly on his second wife, Dorcas, and her love of reading novels. He tells us that she would return from hearing a sermon at the Tabernacle and read late into the night 'until she had seen the hero and heroine happily married' (C., p. 2). On other occasions she returned from her devotions to indulge in "'Tales of love and Maids forsaken'" (C., p. 2). Lackington complains that he 'often was prevailed upon to hear her read those gay, frothy narratives' until 'I, by degrees, began to lose my relish for more important subjects' (C., p. 2).

No longer is Dorcas's love of books 'a very fortunate circumstance for us both' bringing 'rational amusement' and tending 'to promote my trade' (M., p. 353). Far from being the model of virtue and kindness presented in her epitaph, Dorcas is now depicted as Eve leading her husband to destruction by offering him the wrong sort of knowledge. Her novels threaten to bewitch, even un-man him:

It was not long before novels, romances, and poets occupied a considerable part of our time, so that I even neglected my shop; for being so much delighted with those fairy regions, I could scarce bear the idea of business. (C., p. 2)

This is similar to the fate suffered by Jolly who gave over the care of his shop to his wife so that he could indulge in reading and drinking (C., p. 98). Both Lackington and Jolly are shown to have fallen into the trap of reading imaginative literature which conservative critics warned against. St Clair reports that George Hadley of Hull had objected to the extension and improvement of local elementary schooling by arguing that servants were prone to read when they should have been sleeping to refresh themselves for the following day's labour.²³ Given Lackington's personal wealth, accumulated through his efforts as a

²³ St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, pp. 109–10.

bookseller, his account of neglecting his business seems strange. This passage, like his criticism of women reading novels, appears to be simply a re-working of familiar arguments amongst those, like Burke, who preferred learning to be the sole preserve of the wealthy and the godly.

The Confessions is filled with images of disease and contagion. It is no coincidence that Jolly, a lover of books, is presented to us wracked by disease, too ill even to respond to Lackington's letter before he dies. In common with other writers he admired during this period of his life, Lackington views the spread of ideas of the Radical Enlightenment as an infection. For example, Richard Watson, wrote of the dangers to low- to middle-ranking readers of being 'infected by the poison of infidelity'.²⁴ Watson wrote his *Apology for the Bible* in response to the publication of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* which he saw as being particularly targeted at this class.

Lackington links this idea of the infectious nature of infidelity to illicit sex. He constructs a fable about a novice 'young freethinker' who finds himself 'tired of his religious acquaintances' and starts to associate with those 'who, like himself, are become philosophers'. He begins to take "a philosophical walk" in the evenings, and so begins the slide into immorality (C., p.43). Lackington spells out the consequence of this free-thinking:

They are sometimes picked up by prostitutes and enticed into brothels, from whence they carry home to their wives those loathsome diseases which often contaminate the blood of several generations, and for which their own children will perhaps execrate their memory (C., p. 44).

Infidelity, like sexually transmitted disease, Lackington suggests, is highly contagious, spread by unsanctioned contact. This is a subject in which he

²⁴ Richard Watson, *An Apology For The Bible In A Series Of Letters Addressed to Thomas Paine* (London: T. Evans, Cadell and Davies and others, 1796), p. 11.

considers himself an expert, having observed the 'beginning and progress of infidelity' amongst those frequenting his bookshop. This particular disease is, he warns, spreading at an alarming rate:

Before the French revolution, infidelity had made great havock in England; but there is great reason to fear that since it has increased an hundred fold: and God only knows where this destructive pestilence will end. (C., p. 45)

Lackington might not have known where the pestilence would end, but he appears to have understood where it began. He sees free-thinking books as the means of contagion and voices concern about 'gentlemen's servants' being 'taught infidelity' in London whilst waiting at table and listening to conversations. More troubling perhaps for this former bookseller is the knowledge that 'Paine's Age of Reason has been handed from cottage to cottage' (C., p. 78). The sense of infection attached to each book is palpable but Lackington had further reason for remorse. He recalls his years in business with concern:

Before the French revolution took place I had some young men and boys in my house as apprentices and shopmen. I have reason to think that those young people were not ignorant of my sentiments, for as they dined with me and my friends, they must have, at times, heard free conversations, jokes on priests, &c. if not worse: for although I was not fond of propagating infidelity, yet from my friends, and perhaps from myself also, they must know that I paid no attention to religion. It is also likely that they read my freethinking books. (C., p. 77).

Like the unsuspecting wives of the philosophical young men, the young apprentices housed with Lackington are presented as victims of a fatal disease. We learn that as a consequence of their free-thinking, they became dissipated, got into debt and were bankrupted.

Reading and Responsibility

In *The Confessions*, Lackington presents the spread of literacy as spawning moral degeneracy and 'infidelity'. He writes that it is only 'since the French revolution' that he 'perceived the sad effects produced by the spreading of infidelity' (C. p. 78). Generally, he is alarmed at the religious and social consequences of Enlightenment learning rather than the political repercussions.

Neither Lackington nor Burke trace what might seem with the advantage of hindsight to be the obvious link between political enquiry and emphasis placed by Methodism, and indeed Protestantism generally, on taking personal responsibility for spiritual welfare. Wesley had stimulated a spirit of self-examination in his followers whom he encouraged to record their spiritual progress in personal testimony. Lackington was one of many to benefit from Wesley's endeavours to spread both literacy and, arguably, self-scrutiny. As Iain Hampsher-Monk has shown, the emphasis the Dissenting community placed on individual assent to matters of belief in religion could be carried through to political decisions.²⁵ He notes the disproportionate influence of Dissenters on science and manufacturing, as well as on political theory and cites examples such as Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestley, William Godwin and Richard Price. This also reflects the importance of education amongst Dissenters who were barred from attending Oxford and Cambridge and established their own institutions of higher education.

Lackington, Thrifty and Jolly are all portrayed as having had a Methodist background and had to various degrees benefited from the access to religious books it promoted. It is interesting to note that it was a religious dispute within

²⁵ Iain Hampsher-Monk (ed.), *The Impact Of The French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 17.

his congregation which leads Jolly to read more widely. We learn that 'various pamphlets were wrote on both sides'. Once Jolly had begun to read 'controversy', it was not long until he abandoned Christianity altogether (C., pp. 97–8). Many others, like Lackington's Jolly, having discovered a taste for debate, moved naturally to politics, but, as one writer observes, this was strongly discouraged in the dying years of the century:

Enquiry, - according to the modern construction, signifies Sediton. In the old English dictionary, it was held a CONSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE, derived from MAGNA CHARTA and the BILL OF RIGHTS, for the people to *enquire* into the conduct of Kings or Ministers, and into the errors of their government.²⁶

In the same work, published by Daniel Isaac Eaton, who was prosecuted for publishing this and other works and for selling *The Rights of Man*, the author declared that 'it is much to be lamented that more attention is not paid to the education of youth'.²⁷

In the years immediately following the French Revolution, political rhetoric became a sensitive issue. As we have seen, Lackington writes of noticing the 'sad effects' of infidelity 'since the French Revolution', and the spectre of 1789 hovers as a threat throughout *The Confessions* as it never did in the *Memoirs*. We will probably never know precisely what persuaded Lackington to turn away from the intellectual values he promoted in his *Memoirs*, but in the final years of the eighteenth century, the threat which Lackington perceived in radical dissent, appears more widespread, reinforced by the popular literature of the time. The tunes of patriotic songs, such as the anthem of the Royal Navy, 'Hearts of Oak',

²⁶ Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1795), pp. 19–20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174. For further information about Eaton, see Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, p. 68

were used by radicals to summon 'Britain's brave sons' to join with Frenchman and 'all tyrants o'erthrow'.²⁸

One such verse, now in the Somerset Country Archives, illustrates the anger of those calling for political reform. It has, at some point, been screwed into a tight ball and so retains physical evidence of the intense emotions which could be excited by the sentiments it expresses. The poem is held in a file with two others, in various hands, dating to the turn of the century, one of which is a transcription of Dorcas Lackington's epitaph. It may be an accident of storage which links this poem to Lackington, but it nonetheless provides a useful example of the volatile state of the nation at the end of the eighteenth century:

Let half starv'd Britons all unite
To tread oppressors down
Nor fear the rage of red or blue
Those Despots of the Crown

Then raise your drooping spirits up
Nor starve by Pitts Decree
Pull down the Tyrant from his Throne
Proclaim French liberty

On cursed statesmen and their crew
Let bolts of vengeance fly
Let farmers & [words illegible] too
Like B - [urke?] — be doomed to die
Then shall we live as Heav'n design'd
On finest Flour of Wheat
When all the Knaves are put to Death
Our joy will be complete

Then raise your drooping spirits up
Nor starve by Pitts Decree
Fix up the sacred Guillotine
Proclaim French liberty.²⁹

²⁸ Thomas Spence, *One Pennyworth of Pig's Meat* (London: for T. Spence, 1793–5), pp. 280 and 98–9. This is the first volume of three collecting the weekly periodical. Volumes 2 and 3 are entitled, *Pig's Meat*.

²⁹ Somerset Country Archives, DD/SF H/145.2977-2983.

The reference to longing for 'Flour of Wheat' alludes to the food shortages of 1795 and 1796 which had resulted from bad harvests and led to huge rises in wheat prices and to widespread food riots.³⁰ The turbulent mid 1790s also saw riots against the war with France (which included an attack on the King's coach at the opening of Parliament), riots against the drive to recruit men for the army which followed this, naval mutinies at Spithead and the Nore, and discontent at the new taxes being levied.³¹ The call to set up the Guillotine was just what Pitt and others in authority feared in England. We know that Lackington had witnessed the confusion and fear generated by mob rule on the streets of London during the Gordon Riots. When looking for reasons for his change of heart, which seems to have occurred between his retirement to the country in the late 1790s and his writing of *The Confessions* in 1803, the troubled state of the nation seems highly relevant.

There are further examples of revolutionary verse in a periodical produced between 1793 and 1795 by the radical bookseller, Thomas Spence. Spence directly challenged Burke's concerns about the unregulated spread of learning amongst the lower classes with his *One Penny Worth of Pig's Meat: Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*. Priced at one penny, this was intended 'to promote among the Labouring Part of Mankind proper Ideas of their Situation, of their Importance, and of their Rights'.³² *Pig's Meat* was a miscellany made up of short

³⁰ The average price of an imperial quarter of wheat rose from 49s 3d in 1793 and 52s 3d in 1794 to 75s 2d in 1795, 78s 7d in 1796. It fell slightly during the next three years and rose to 113s 10d in 1800. See table of average wheat prices in Jeremy Gregory and John Stevenson, *The Longman Companion to Britain in the Eighteenth Century 1688–1820* (London: Longman, 2000), p. 276.

³¹ See, for example Gregory and Stevenson's brief 'Political Chronology' in *The Longman Companion*, pp. 25–26; and Roy Porter, *English Society in the 18th Century* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 347–354.

³² Spence, *One Pennyworth of Pig's Meat*, title page.

excerpts of political writing. As Paul Keen observes, Spence drew upon a vast range of sources in the compilation of his periodical:

It offered a collection of passages from both the populist chapbook tradition and the great Whig canon, anthologising a range of authors and sources which included Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Barlow, Cromwell, Harrington, Milton, Hume, Locke, Berkeley, Swift, Tacitus, D'Alembert, Paine, Richard Price, Priestley, Dr Johnson's *Dictionary*, Erskine's trial speeches, the *Analytical's* review of the *Rights of Man*, and segments of the new French Constitution.³³

There are a number of similarities between Spence and Lackington, the bookseller. Both came from dissenting backgrounds and both worked to promote reading amongst the working-classes. The mixing of songs, with discourse old and new, old canon poets, and Enlightenment philosophers found in *Pig's Meat* bears some resemblance to the rich mix of poetic fragments collected in Lackington's *Memoirs*. Spence, unlike Lackington, appears to have been motivated by a clear political agenda. He endeavoured not simply to supply cheap reading material but to re-organise language itself by producing a new system of phonetics to make it easier to learn to read.

Spence's efforts to radicalise the poor through reading was just one of numerous such endeavours. Groups such as the London Corresponding Society (LCS), set up by the shoemaker, Thomas Hardy, aimed to encourage political discussion amongst poorer members of society.³⁴ These organisations relied upon print to spread their ideas. The LCS published *The Politician* four times between December 1794 and January 1795, and *The Moral and Political Magazine* twelve times between June 1796 and May 1797. Similar publications were produced in other parts of the country, such as the *Sheffield Register* published by Henry Redhead Yorke for the Sheffield Corresponding Society. Yorke also produced

³³ Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, p. 158.

³⁴ See H.T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789–1815* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 9.

The Patriot, a fortnightly periodical which ran from 1792–1794. The *Manchester Herald* was set up in March 1792 but was closed down by the government in March 1793. Meanwhile the *Leicester Herald* ran from May 1792 until November 1795 and *The Cabinet* was produced in Norwich between 1794 and 1795.³⁵ Across the regions in England political dissent was being disseminated.

The concern of men like Burke, and indeed of the Lackington of *The Confessions*, was not so much that the decisions of the government were being challenged as that this was taking place and generating organised discussion amongst the poor. As we have seen, Lackington was worried about Paine's *Age of Reason* being read in cottages. The Attorney General was less concerned when the first part of Paine's *Rights of Man* was sold at 3s 6d., than when Part II was sold in 6d editions 'and thrust into the hands of subjects of every description'.³⁶ As Altick has written, 'The widespread belief that printed exhortations to "sedition" and "atheism" found their way into every calloused hand in the kingdom was nothing short of a nightmare.'³⁷ Lackington's own attempt to relieve the blight of superstition amongst the poor and encourage self-development, appears to have stimulated guilt and fear in his later life. Unlike Spence, he had generally been more interested in commerce than politics, although he had quietly applauded French resistance to tyranny in his *Memoirs*. In the turmoil of 1800s, his earlier efforts to provide cheap reading matter for new classes of readers was no longer politically neutral, and by the time he came to write *The Confessions*, he clearly felt responsibility for the radicalising of poor readers and was deeply unsettled by the resultant political turbulence he saw around him.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 19–20.

³⁶ Hampsher-Monk, *The Impact of the French Revolution*, p. 19.

³⁷ Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 72.

Responding to Revolutionary Reading

In the mid 1790s the government responded to radical publications by convicting publishers such as Eaton, transporting LCS member Maurice Margarot to Botany Bay and imprisoning Thomas Spence. In 1794 *Habeus Corpus* was suspended and radical leaders Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, Thomas Holcroft, and John Thelwal were charged with high treason. In a famous trial they overturned the evidence against them. The 'Two Acts' were passed in 1795: the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act extended the law of treason to spoken and written words, whilst the Seditious Meetings Act restricted public meetings and lectures and was clearly aimed at putting a stop to the activities of the corresponding societies. Print became the first line of attack in the government's battle against revolution. As Keen writes:

With the advent of a reform movement on a mass scale, the prospect of open debate within print culture was being increasingly demonized as an inevitable prelude, rather than a healthy alternative, to violent insurrection.³⁸

Lackington, however, looked to books and to religion to cure the ills of the nation. He turned to books of sermons and to preaching the word of God. Whilst it appears, as this chapter argues, that he was deeply unsettled by the political climate of revolt, his anxiety at seeing Paine's salute to deism, *The Age of Reason*, passed from hand to hand amongst the rural poor was religious as well as political:

The honest and industrious part of the poor, amidst their poverty and afflictions, used to derive great consolation from the hopes of a better world to come; but Paine and Co. have deprived them of their only comfort and support, and left them discontented with their station, and ready for mischief. (C., p. 78)

³⁸ Keen, *The Crisis of Literature*, p. 170.

Similarly, as he looks back on the fate of the young apprentices who had imbibed free-thinking ideas in his house, he worries that when they left or started work elsewhere, they 'began the world without any sense of religion' (C., p. 77).

Lackington sees the problems facing the country arising from the divorce of learning from religion. As we have seen, he believed that in his case the split seems to have occurred with the popularity of free-thinking authors whom he thinks 'chargeable with some of the dreadful evils that now are inundating Europe' (C., p. 17). He accuses these, with Paine, of robbing the poor of the comfort of religion. In a reversal of his aversion to 'superstition' and bigotry so vigorously set out in his *Memoirs*, Lackington now finds that he would rather listen to 'the poor ignorant enthusiastic David Burford . . . than to the most shrewd and witty remarks of my old freethinking acquaintances, who used to set the table in a roar'. He explains why:

The good old David Burford's fear of God made him live soberly and righteously; his faith enabled him many years to bear poverty and affliction with cheerfulness, as believing that all would work together for his good — as he would often tell us. His hope of going to a better world enabled him to expect his approaching dissolution with joy. . . . Among all your freethinking acquaintances did you ever know one whose reading, learning, or wit enabled him to live so uprightly and comfortably in so much poverty and affliction; or who could, like him, look death steadily in the face with humble joy. (C., p. 30–1)

We know from his *Memoirs* that when Lackington himself was confronted with the reality of poverty, he had rejected the path of placid acceptance he celebrates in this portrait of Burford, a 'poor weaver'.³⁹ He had thrown himself into schemes, stimulated by an enquiring mind, to increase his fortune and his social standing. As a wealthy man, however, he could afford to applaud the

³⁹ Burford was a 'poor weaver' whose house was licensed for public worship in 1774. He was a member of the Taunton Octagon, a place of Methodist worship opened by John Wesley in 1776 and used until 1812 when congregations moved to Lackington's Temple in Taunton. The Octagon was eventually sold to pay for repairs to the Temple. See Herbert W. White, 'Wesley's Taunton Octagon', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XLVIII (1992), 113–118.

simple faith of Burford. There is an element of what E. P. Thompson describes as 'psychic exploitation' in Lackington's advocacy of Methodism during the crisis of the 1790s and early 1800s.⁴⁰ But, there again, he writes as an old man struggling with ill health, and finds himself envying one who is able to 'look death steadily in the face with humble joy'.

Whatever his motives in championing the cause of religion, Lackington seeks to unite it once again with the value of learning. He quotes from the writing of Joseph Addison, collected in *The Evidences of the Christian Religion* (1730) after Addison's death, with the specific intention of countering atheism and infidelity and defending 'Christian Revelation'.⁴¹ In Section VI of this collection, the author rails at the 'odium' cast on the clergy of the Church of England by the deliberate use of the word 'priest', laden as it was with implications of superstition. Instead, Addison argues that the Church should be seen as a centre of learning, offering education for all on a regular basis. Lackington embraces this view:

I think it is Addison who says, That such as are prejudiced against the names religion, church, priest, and the like, should consider the clergy as so many philosophers, the churches as schools, and their sermons as lectures for the reformation and improvement of their audience. How would the heart of Socrates or Tully have rejoiced had they lived in a nation where the law had made provision for philosophers to read lectures of morality and theology, every seventh day, in several schools erected at the public charge, through the whole country; at

⁴⁰ See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 411. Thompson argues that the methodical discipline in life, and particularly in attitudes to labour, encouraged by Methodism renders its members especially suitable for employment in the factories and mills being developed at the time. He views the educational provision established by Wesley as a form of insidious 'indoctrination' (p. 412). His argument focuses upon the period of counter-revolution in the 1790s to the early decades of the nineteenth century and does not give weight to the expansion of learning in the earlier years of the eighteenth century although he does acknowledge an association between Methodism and Jacobinism in the early 1790s (p. 387).

⁴¹ Addison, *The evidences of the Christian religion, by the Right Honorable Joseph Addison, Esq; To which are added, several discourses against atheism and infidelity, and in Defence of the Christian Revelation, occasionally published by him and others: And now collected into one Body, and digested under their proper Heads. With a preface, containing the sentiments of Mr. Boyle, Mr. Lock, and Sir Isaac Newton, concerning the gospel-revelation* (London: Tonson, 1730).

which lectures, all ranks and sexes, without distinction, were obliged to be present for their general improvement. (C., p. 70–71)⁴²

This passage suggests that Lackington had maintained but qualified his aims of bringing reading to women and the poor by advocating the benefits of religious instruction to these groups.

He was not alone in this resolve. Hannah More, playwright, bluestocking and a campaigning, evangelical Methodist, also looked with horror on the effect of Thomas Paine's writings on the labouring classes.⁴³ She determined to intervene and halt the march of atheism by using the extensive network of chapmen who traversed the country selling pamphlets and cheap books to market her own range of inexpensive religious tracts. These were priced between 1/2d and 1 1/2d and were subsidised by Methodist colleagues. Altick notes that in the first six weeks her Short Repository Tracts were made available, 300,000 copies had been sold wholesale and sales continued to grow.⁴⁴ Thompson, however, writes that many were 'left to litter the servants' quarters of the great houses' suggesting that they were in fact bought by the wealthy with the aim of instructing their servants, who responded by ignoring them.⁴⁵

More tried to present her Christian message in a form which she felt would appeal to poorer readers. She wrote short dramas in instalments to engage the interest and sympathies of her readers. In her *Village Politics* (1790), she illustrates what she sees as the dangers lurking in radical jargon by relating a conversation between Tom Hod, a mason, and Jack Anvil, a blacksmith. When Hod, inspired by the example of French reformers, declares that he is 'for a

⁴² See also, *ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴³ See S. J. Skedd, 'Hannah More (1745–1833) in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19179> [accessed 22 January, 2013].

⁴⁴ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 75.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 386.

Constitution, and Organisation, and Equalisation, and Fraternisation', Anvil, with a kindly, patient air, explains that these French ideas would bring hunger and murder to their community. They would do better to trust the judgement of the local landowner, Sir John, who values his family's old castle and the stability of the government of England. More ends the dialogue with a reworking of the catechism, the traditional form of question and answer instruction relied upon by the Church to explain doctrine:

Tom: What is the new Rights of Man?

Jack: Battle, murder, and sudden death.

Tom: What is it to be an enlightened people?

Jack: To put out the light of the gospel, confound right and wrong, and grope about in pitch darkness.⁴⁶

Hod is thus persuaded that he is not unhappy after all, and that he should burn the book which he has been reading. Thus More tries to persuade poorer readers to put aside revolutionary ideas, leave politics to landowners like 'Sir John' and turn instead to religion.

Lackington, too, sought to instil the virtues of acquiescence to fortune, patience, respect and industry, such as were taught by the religion. He organised Sunday schools and arranged for visiting preachers to give sermons, perhaps remembering the enthusiasm with which he had received Methodist instruction from field preachers as a young man. In 1803 he contacted the Methodist community in nearby Thornbury and was put in touch with 'an excellent young man', Mr Ward, of the Dursley circuit. Ward came to preach on a common called Alveston-Down 'to about sixty or seventy people, small and great'. Lackington was delighted:

Mrs L. conversed with some of them afterwards, who expressed thankfulness for having heard a sermon that they could understand, as

⁴⁶ Hannah More, *Village Politics* (London: Rivington, 1792), p. 19.

they said that they could not understand the sermons at church, because there were so many fine words in them. (C. p. 177).

Through Mr Ward, Lackington was continuing to reach out to the labouring classes, to guide them in a very different education from the one he had recommended in 1791. He provided a speaker practised at delivering his message to the poor. In many ways this stems from the same imaginative empathy which led him to design his catalogues so that they were accessible to those unused to buying books regularly.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the tensions between Lackington's past life and his reformed retirement in the country which mark *The Confessions*. We see him abandon his former ambition to build the 'reading nation'. Whilst he had profited from his own education and a love of reading, the idyllic portrait he painted in his *Memoirs* of 'Dolly' riding to town reading novels had turned sour in an atmosphere of rebellion and fear. For Altick the legacy of the promotion of reading to which Lackington had contributed was less positive than the *Memoirs* appeared to promise:

The major result of the surge of popular interest in reading during the 1790s, therefore, was not so much any permanent expansion of the reading audience as the reaction of the ruling class.⁴⁷

In *The Confessions* Lackington appears to recognise his own complicity in the chaos he saw around him. As Robert Hall wrote, 'a considerable proportion in England of those who pursue literature as a profession, may justly be considered as the open or disguised abettors of Atheism'.⁴⁸ Lackington turned away from many of the books which had once delighted him, but he continued to

⁴⁷ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 72.

⁴⁸ Robert Hall, *Modern Infidelity Considered* (Cambridge, M. Watson, 1800), p. 5.

put books in the hands of poorer readers convinced that religious books would dispel the poison of 'infidelity'. Lackington's plan to use reading to heal the rifts caused by free-thinking is the subject of the next and final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Eight

READING FOR REDEMPTION

Lackington may have felt unnerved by what he perceived to be the negative impact of the spread of literacy amongst the masses, but he nevertheless retained faith in reading as a tool to reverse the tide of ‘infidelity’ sweeping the country. *The Confessions* does not simply record the remorse he felt at his movement away from Methodism to free-thinking, but also sets out the path of his re-conversion. Like the many personal accounts of conversion published by John Wesley in his *Arminian Magazine*, Lackington’s own experience of conversion, falling away, and re-conversion is written in order to encourage others to return to Christianity and stand firm against ‘backsliding’.¹ Reading is central to this project. It provides the stimulus by which Lackington regains his faith. Indeed, *The Confessions* can be read as a map designed to show others the path to religious observance, via a series of texts selected by Lackington to bolster belief in the message of the Gospels. In addition to writing this further reflection on his life, Lackington also strove to counter ‘infidelity’ by distributing books and tracts amongst the poor of his neighbourhood. This chapter will examine the ways in which he adapted his reading practices in later life and redirected his literary interests from a broad swathe of subjects to an intense and devotional focus on divinity. It will identify old reading habits put to new uses and discuss the new

¹ The *Arminian Magazine*, founded by Wesley in 1778, offered extracts illustrating holy lives, essays and other writings illustrating universal redemption. See D. Bruce Hindmarch, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 229–30.

We know that Lackington bought a six-volume edition of the *Arminian Magazine* by 1807 because he complained about the price charged for the order in a letter to Lackington and Allan. See Cambridge University Library, ANL Munby Papers and Items from his Library, ADD 8200.

means employed by Lackington to enjoy texts, to cement new relationships and to work towards spiritual salvation rather than social advancement.

Persuading the Self and Believing in Divine Revelation

Chapter 7 examines the horror with which Lackington looked back upon his life in London spent reading free-thinking texts, after he had abandoned Methodism.

Bruce Hindmarsh sees *The Confessions* as an admission that ‘the modern self was unsupportable’ and as evidence that Lackington was no longer the pioneer of modernist identity described by Mascuch, but instead a man who ‘shudders back from the brink and reposes in the end in the community of faith and the self-transcending word of the gospel.’² There is much in *The Confessions* which supports this view. Lackington seeks assurance from old friends, deliberately builds up relationships with other readers, and places trust in divine revelation.

Yet his later autobiography is not totally devoid of the self-publicising bombast of the *Memoirs*. It seeks to ‘sell’ religious faith as the earlier work had sought to sell books. Lackington writes that ‘repentance does not consist in a momentary sorrow, but in a change of disposition and life’, and it is very much as a testament to this change and as an account of the practical steps taken to repent that the book should be read (*C.*, p. 23).

Lackington tells readers of the changes in his literary tastes and priorities early in *The Confessions*. He recalls that:

For these last two or three years I have not even loved the sight of that part of my private library where the books stand which seduced me from the simplicity of the gospel. (*C.*, p.47)

² Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 349.

What follows is an account of the way in which the Bible became, for Lackington, the central text in his life, and influenced not just what he read, but also how he read. A few pages earlier, he laid the foundations to justify this new emphasis in his reading life by describing to a frail, old acquaintance and former free-thinker, 'J.B.', the impact this book had had on so many people, including 'the most learned, the wisest, and best of men':

In reading history and biography we learn, that many of the most intelligent men, after many years spent in voluminous libraries in eager search of science, of knowledge, and wisdom, have, in the end, thrown aside even the most respectable works of ancient and modern philosophers, moralists, historians, politicians, poets, &c. and have in their partly-neglected Bible found a treasure which every where else they had sought for in vain. The brightest geniuses have found ample satisfaction in that book. There is the sublime and the beautiful; the most pathetic stories, and elegant parables; the grandest descriptions, and the most august ideas of the Deity; the most perfect morality; the greatest motives to virtue, and the most awful denunciations against vice. (C., p. 31)

In this passage, Lackington declares that the example of 'the brightest geniuses' in shunning philosophy for the Bible is one which he should not be ashamed to follow. He thereby redefines his old notions of learning in which he shied away from 'superstition' and 'enthusiasm' in favour of a reasoned judgement to join the ranks of the 'best of men' in favouring Christian revelation. What is more, he presents the Bible as satisfying all spiritual, intellectual and emotional yearnings and as the answer to the very questions of morality occupying thinkers, both secular and clerical, throughout the century. His appreciation of the literary quality of the scriptures reflects a growing appreciation in England of the Bible as literature. David Norton records that Byron noted after the death of Shelley, that his friend, despite his deistic leanings

and admiration for Thomas Paine, was also 'a great admirer of Scripture as a composition'.³

Lackington goes on to describe how the real value of the Bible resides in the guidance it gives on how to live a righteous life in order to gain redemption:

In a word, in that book we are taught the way of holy living; and by so living we ensure to ourselves an eternal state of felicity in the realms of everlasting light and love. (C., p.31)

In order to emphasise this, we learn that J.B. has been persuaded to change his own life and behaviour and embrace Christianity. Just as Lackington uses the story of the life and miserable death of Jack Jolly to warn readers of the dangers of an unredeemed life, so he introduces J.B. as an example of one who returns to religion and achieves a 'good' death reconciled to God in the best tradition of Methodist conversion narratives.⁴ J.B. has, we learn, 'but one book' of his own, the New Testament, a book 'which angels could not have composed', which early Christians suffered to preserve, and, more importantly for Lackington, which has the power to save souls:

In those sacred pages life and immortality is brought to light; a glorious prospect is opened to us beyond the grave; where clouds and darkness are no more. (C., pp. 33–4)

The Bible is the key text in the conversion of both J.B. and Lackington.

The process is gradual. Lackington's interest in religious subjects had been stimulated by reading review journals (as will be discussed), and we learn that he 'now began to read a little in the Bible, and took some pleasure in it; and I became more and more serious and thoughtful' (C., p. 51). Not only is his

³ David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 288.

⁴ For example, see 'An Account of Thomas Eltringham Who Was Killed By the Explosion of Inflammable Air In A Coal-Pit, At Greenside, Jan. 18, 1797' in *The Methodist Magazine for the Year 1798 Being a Continuation of The Arminian Magazine XXI* (London: A Whitfield, 1798), pp. 121–28. Eltringham had particular pleasure in reading 'the Word of God and other religious books', he lived a model life as a Methodist and died tragically 'not leaving us in doubt concerning himself, to whom sudden death was sudden glory'. (pp. 123, 127)

temperament influenced by his bible-reading, but Lackington develops a habit of regular study, reminiscent of his days in Taunton as a boy when he read ten chapters a day.⁵ It is the New Testament which particularly moves Lackington. As Hindmarsh observes, by presenting readers with so many accounts of human responses to the divine call, it challenges the reader to respond personally to God's message.⁶ Lackington took up this challenge:

The more you read the New Testament, the more you will enter into and partake of the Spirit of it; and your love for it will increase in proportion. (C., p. 36)

Towards the later part of *The Confessions*, he recalls how even before he was committed to Methodism, he had long admired the character of Christ, finding inspiration from his teaching as a moral philosopher whose 'precepts also appeared to me perfectly well calculated to promote both public and private happiness' (C., p. 130). For Lackington, the process of transforming his life has begun and continues through his reading:

In this state of mind I went quietly and contented on for some years. As I had no relish for the ridiculous pursuits of those around me, my amusement was reading, or, now and then, scribbling. (C., p. 130)

Lackington builds a picture of a gradual alteration of his reading habits and consequential return to an active religious life. This change is 'not instantaneous but progressive' and is characterised by a growing studiousness in his reading: 'I read and seriously reflect' (C., pp. 58–9). By this Lackington seems to suggest that his reading was now more contemplative than in earlier years of study, and this emphasis is characteristic of other Methodist conversion narratives. For example, Richard Moss's account of his struggles between faith and backsliding shows a similar path to conversion. Moss recalls how he set himself 'to recover

⁵ See Chapter 2, p. 49.

⁶ Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, pp. 13–15

my reading, which I had entirely lost'. His subsequent reading of the Bible leads to the same kind of reflection described by Lackington:

I began to consider what an unhappy condition I was in, I spent many hours in serious thought. I read the Bible; compared my present and past life and felt more and more self-condemnation.⁷

In common with other accounts of conversion, both Moss and Lackington distinguish between their new life and the old one. In Lackington's case this is reflected in his attitudes to reading:

In this retreat [his new home in the country], I pursued the same course in reading, until I was roused from my careless state of mind, by observing the dreadful effects which had succeeded the spreading of infidelity. The more I reflected, the more was I filled with horror at the moral depravity that I saw increasing among all ranks. From those reflections I was soon led to conclude that the works which had produced such baleful effects, must be fatally wrong. By degrees I laid my freethinking books aside, and begun once more to study my Bible. To assist me in that study I sent for several learned, sensible commentaries on the scriptures, and also for many other books in divinity, including the best answers that had been made to writers on the side of infidelity; so that I am now convinced of their sophistry. (C., p. 56)

Lackington does not specify which commentaries he consulted but his urge to read scriptures 'correctly' as well as devoutly was a characteristic of the Evangelical revival. As Michael Ledger-Lomas argues, such commentaries guided readers in their responses to the Bible:

Neither narrowly homiletic nor purely scholarly, they combine dutiful attempts to recover the original meaning of scriptural terms with blunt recommendations for their application.⁸

Lackington also read other popular aids which he credits with helping him in his understanding of the Bible. These included Augustin Calmet's *Historical, Geographical, Critical, Chronological and Etymological Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (1732); Humphret Prideaux's *The Old and New Testament Connected*

⁷ 'Experience of Mr. Richard Moss', *The Methodist Magazine for the Year 1798*, p. 4.

⁸ Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Caroline and Paul: Biblical Commentaries as Evidence of Reading in Victorian Britain' in *The History of Reading: Vol. 2, Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750–1950* ed. by Katie Halsey and W. R. Owens (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 32–47 (p. 33).

(1716–18) which was designed to ‘connect’ the account of the ancient world told in the Bible with the history of the Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian and Roman empires; and first-century Jewish historian Josephus’s account of the history of the Jews.⁹

Lackington consulted texts written in response to specific attacks from religious sceptics to exorcise his free-thinking past. Three works, in particular, helped to persuade him that ‘the gospel was a revelation from God’ (C., p. 132).¹⁰ One, he specifies, was the ‘third enlarged edition of the first volume, and the second edition of the second volume’ of Robert Jenkin’s *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion* (1708). He also read William Paley’s *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794) and Joseph Butler’s *The Analogy of Religion* (1736).

Jenkin, a former Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, had written his two-volume defence of Christianity in order to reverse what he saw as the erosion of religious belief in the country. He asserted that the reach of philosophy was, by definition, limited, and could extend no further than ‘uncertain Hopes and doubtful Arguments’, whereas Christ and the Apostles spoke with words which were ‘Spirit, and they were Life’.¹¹ Lackington quotes long passages from Butler and Jenkin and writes that Paley’s *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* was the ‘first entire work that I read in defence of revealed religion’. It clearly made an impact.¹²

⁹ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 133.

¹⁰ Lackington also recommends these books ‘to establish you in the belief of the truth of Divine Revelation’, C., p. 35.

¹¹ Robert Jenkin, *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion* (London: TW for JJ and P. Knapton, J. Brotherton, J. Hazard, and others, 1734) II, p. xxxiii.

¹² See *The Confessions*, pp. 133–5 for examples of passages by these authors.

By the time I had gone through this very able and convincing work once, I was effectually humbled, and obliged to cry out, God be merciful to me a dreadful sinner! I was obliged to confess, that the wisdom, power and love of God were displayed in the gospel. (C., p. 131)

Paley, writing at the end of eighteenth century, sought to re-establish the bond between religion and morality which had been challenged by Shaftesbury and ultimately severed by Hume.¹³ Shaftesbury had condemned a moral system which encouraged good behaviour, not through love of virtue, but by a promise of rewards for virtue and punishment for transgression in the afterlife. Paley aimed to unite private and public virtue by showing that virtuous behaviour, whether or not prompted by self-interested hope of heaven or fear of hell, nonetheless contributes to public happiness on earth, and, moreover, accords with the will of a benevolent God. For Paley the will of God was the foundation for morality.¹⁴

We see evidence that Lackington had absorbed this argument in his critique of Shaftesbury in *The Confessions*. He appears to have copied his argument from another book written in defence of religion, John Leland's *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers that have appeared in England in the Last and Present Century with Observations upon them and some Account of the Answers that have been published against them* (1755).¹⁵ Lackington attacks the view that virtuous behaviour motivated by hope of a heavenly reward is self-interested, insisting that the happiness promised by the New Testament is 'noble and sublime' and offers good for all (C., p. 48). He writes that, even while he was an 'infidel', although he had appreciated the reasoning of philosophers like Shaftesbury, he

¹³ See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660–1750, II Shaftesbury to Hume*, p. 239.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁵ Compare the quotation from *The Confessions*, p.49 to 'Earl of Shaftesbury' in John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers That Have Appeared in England in the Last and Present Century* (London: B. Dod, 1754), p. 97.

had not been persuaded to renounce vice. It was only once he had begun to read the Bible again and re-established his 'belief in the gospel' that he reformed his behaviour (C., p. 50). Lackington attributes an almost supernatural power to his reading of the Bible, one which penetrates where mere reason had failed.

New and Adapted Modes of Reading

Lackington thus claims to be strangely empowered by his new mode of meditative reading of divinity. So central is reading to his re-conversion, that he provides valuable insights in *The Confessions* into reading practices old and new. As discussed in Chapter 4, we know that he referred to review journals, and particularly the *Monthly Review*, in order to find out about new publications. Antonia Forster admits that there is scant evidence that the judgement of reviewers swayed the book-buying public, but she notes that literary societies tended to take reviews, suggesting that they were valued.¹⁶ More information is coming to light about just how these publications were used in the eighteenth century. Stephen Colclough shows how a young warehouseman, Joseph Hunter, read about books in newspapers and reviews and was particularly resourceful in seeking out those which interested him.¹⁷ John Brewer recounts how Anna Larpent, an avid reader, scrutinised the *Monthly Review* regularly and wrote assessments of books she read in its distinctive style.¹⁸ Lackington, too, continued to value reviews after moving to the country and consulted them in his retirement:

¹⁶ Antonia Forster, 'Review Journals and The Reading Public', p. 175.

¹⁷ Stephen M. Colclough, 'Procuring Books and Consuming Texts: The Reading Experience of a Sheffield Apprentice, 1798', p. 25.

¹⁸ John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent's Reading' in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, p. 229.

I have for many years taken in several of the Reviews of new publications, which are published monthly, and I now begin to read some of the extracts which the Reviewers make from sermons and other books in divinity. In those extracts I frequently found weighty arguments in favour of Christianity. (C., p. 51)

Here we find Lackington scouring reviews, not simply for judgements on new books or even notification of new releases, but for the variety of reading material they offered in the long extracts published to illustrate the reviewer's text.¹⁹ His habit of browsing in these miscellanies of new works is not so different from his reading of other collections of writing fragments – the various dictionaries and anthologies from whose pages he sought quotations. In his retirement, he gleaned spiritual nourishment from fragments of divinity in the reviews. Again, later in *The Confessions*, he comments that 'those extracts gave me a more thoughtful turn, and left my mind open to conviction' (C., p. 131). He also placed large orders for books with the Temple of the Muses including recent publications. This suggests that he was inspired to buy as well as to browse.

The Confessions yields further evidence that Lackington read reviews in order to seek out religious instruction. He quotes from one reviewer's judgement, in the *Monthly Review* of May 1798, that the 'moral tendency' of some lines in the poet Matilda Betham's *Elegies and Other Small Poems* 'may be questioned.' Lackington goes on to criticise the trend amongst 'writers of fictitious history, whether in prose or in verse' to show undue indulgence to vice and 'ascribe too great an efficacy to repentance' (C., p. 25).²⁰ Later in *The Confessions*, as he reflects on the power that religious poetry had to move him even during his years as a sceptic, he notes that he 'read a passage quoted from the works of a freethinking lady, which shews that she was at times in the same state of mind'

¹⁹ For example, the *English Review*, 17 (1791) fills almost seven pages with a synopsis and extracts from Lackington's *Memoirs*, see. pp. 375–81.

²⁰ 'Elegies and Other Small Poems by Matilda Betham', *Monthly Review* (1798), 92–94 (p. 92).

(C., p. 92). He goes on to quote the passage, which is part of an extract in a review of the works of Jeanne-Marie Phlipon Roland included in the *Monthly Review*, volume 35 (1801).²¹

There is one aspect to Lackington's reading life which does seem to have altered in his years of retirement. We find several references in *The Confessions* to his reading with his new wife, Mary. This might have come about as a result of his failing health for he writes that he 'requested Mrs. L to help me in reading ['Dr Whitehead's Life of Mr. Wesley'] through', which suggests that he was not able to read the whole book on his own. We know that even whilst working, he had given up writing Catalogues because of ill-health which he attributed to 'too constant an application to that [writing the catalogues] and reading', so it is possible that close work caused him problems (*M.*, p. 397).

The Confessions also presents a picture of reading being used as a companionable bond in this latest of Lackington's marriages. Lackington is anxious to draw his wife into his fervent new interest in religion just as he had once drawn John Jones into his spiritual orbit through book-buying and reading aloud.²² We learn that once he had 'acquired a relish for religious subjects, I wished to promote it in others, and therefore begun [sic] with Mrs. Lackington'. He then adds that 'Mrs. L. is in her moral conduct one of the most perfect beings I ever saw' (C., p. 51). He appears to have carefully selected a programme of reading to convert his wife to his new way of thinking:

I sent to my late partners for Secker's Lectures on the Catechism, Gilpin's Lectures on the same, Wilson's Sermons, 4 vols and Gilpin's Sermons. These are very plain discourses, easy to be understood, and

²¹ 'The works (never before published) of Jeanne-Marie Phlipon Roland', *The Monthly Review* v.35 (1801), pp. 190–97 (p. 193). Madame Roland was a Girondist who was eventually guillotined in 1793.

²² See Chapter 2, pp. 53–62.

calculated to leave a very lasting impression on the mind. These excellent sermons Mrs. L. and I read together. (C., p. 52)

Their reading yielded results since the books convinced Mary that 'being "as good as she could"' was perfectly right, and of the utmost importance; yet that there was something more in religion' (C., p. 52). Encouraged, he ordered more books, comforted by Mary's enjoyment of their studies:

For some time one sermon was read on every Sunday, but soon Mrs. L. began to like them, and then two or three were read in the course of the week; at last one at least was read every day, and very often part of some other book in divinity, as Mrs. L. said that she preferred such kind of reading far beyond the reading of novels. So that for sometime we have read more books in divinity than on any other subjects; and now Mrs. L. sees very important reasons for going to church, sacrament, &c. (C., p. 53)

The use of the passive mode denies us information about who was actually doing the reading and gives a rather impersonal tone to the description.

Lackington's paternalistic guiding of his young wife's reading and confident reporting that 'Mrs. L sees very important reasons for going to church' is likely to make modern readers rather queasy. We do not know whether Mary actually abandoned all but religious reading, or simply acquiesced in the wishes of her husband. The picture Lackington presents does, however, accord with other accounts of religious works being read socially. Eighteenth-century diarist and shop-keeper, Thomas Turner, read regularly with his wife, his friends and neighbours. His diary includes regular references to reading sermons, pamphlets and discourses with his friend, Thomas Davey.²³ He and his wife, Margaret, also read together.²⁴ Naomi Tadmor uses the example of Margaret Turner to dispel the myth of the 'passive and idle female reader'. She shows the Turners as habitual readers for whom books were instruments of religious devotion that

²³ Thomas Turner, *The Diary of a Georgian Shopkeeper*, ed. by G.H. Jennings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 14, 16, 19, 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

cemented social relationships.²⁵ It is in this light, perhaps, that we should view the Lackingtons' reading as they built a new life together in the country.

Reading with the Heart

As this chapter shows, Lackington describes a new approach to his reading in *The Confessions* which includes a narrowing of the subjects he explores, greater reflection on what he reads, and a deliberate turning away from secular rationalism. We find him settling into habitual daily devotional reading with his wife and, like Turner, discussing his reading with friends.

Isabel Rivers has described how Methodist and Dissenting leaders emphasised the importance of books of practical divinity as motivating forces in the lives of readers. Examples of these books 'concerned with helping the individual to practice the Christian life' include William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651), and Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* (1659), of which Lackington remembers selling many thousand copies (C., p. 75).²⁶ All three of these are listed amongst the books Dick Thrifty relied upon to secure his conversion. When Lackington describes coming across Dick busily reading this selection, he exclaims, 'What! a philosopher reading the "Whole Duty of Man?"', as though to emphasise the change which has come over his friend. The two men discuss the books, agreeing

²⁵ Naomi Tadmor, 'In the even my wife read to me': Women, Reading and Household Life in the Eighteenth Century' in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, pp. 162–174 (p. 163). Colclough too shows how individual readers strengthened social bonds through reading. For example, Anne Lister (1791–1840) gauged the receptiveness of potential lovers to her advances by communicating through texts such as the poems of Lord Byron and certain Classical works, see *Consuming Texts*, p. 137.

²⁶ Isabel Rivers, 'Dissenting and Methodist Books of Practical Divinity', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 127–64 (p. 127).

that Taylor's *Holy Living* is 'an excellent work', and that Law's *A Serious Call* 'had some of the most convincing arguments [Dick] ever met with' (C., p. 76).

Dick and Lackington continue their conversation about the impact of these works on their lives. Whilst reading 'Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, &c.', Lackington 'had often fancied myself a great philosopher, and conceited that my passions were subdued'. The two men agree, however, that the influence of the Stoics upon behaviour is nothing compared to the authority wielded by 'divines' who 'adduce stronger motives for us to subdue and regulate our passions and tempers' (C., p. 76). This is very much the same argument Lackington uses to recommend Bible reading. He and Dick liken their return to reading these religious writers to 'calling on an old sensible acquaintance that I had not seen for many years'. They 'become good friends again' with these books (C., pp. 76–7). We see a more affective engagement with the texts Lackington discusses in *The Confessions* than is evident in his *Memoirs*. For example, he writes of having 'sometimes cried out in words of Thomas "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief"' whilst reading defences of revelation (C., pp. 52–3).

The way in which Lackington describes the practice of reading in this later book makes clear that he regards it as an essential act of practical piety. No longer convinced by the 'plausible reasoning in some infidel writers', and awakened to the revelation in the Bible, he relies upon faith and heart to discern meaning in what he reads. He asks Dick, 'Are you not in heart a Christian?' (C., p. 78). The heart becomes the arbiter of value for Lackington in his later life. We find him 'perceiving' rather than reasoning truths as the following passage illustrates:

I must inform you, that it was not by merely reading of defences of Christianity, &c. that I was enabled to discover its truth, and believe

its doctrines. I was for sometime in a state of suspense, doubt and distraction. But soon the pure precepts of the gospel began to have some influence on my life and conversation; as I perceived that the morality taught by Christ was infallibly right, and I resolved to regulate my conduct according to his instructions, at least as much as I could: I left off cursing and swearing, filthy talking, &c. (C., p. 66)

Lackington quotes at length from many of the works which he describes as having the greatest influence on the awakening of his Christian consciousness. We find a long passage from William Gilpin's Sermon XLVIII, which takes as its text a passage Mrs Bowden might have approved of, from James, II. xiv, 'Faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone'.²⁷ Lackington also includes excerpts from George Horne's discourse on 'The Blessing of a Cheerful Heart' (1794), Robert Jenkin's *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion* (1698), Madame de Genlis's *Religion Considered as the Only Basis of Happiness and True Philosophy* (1787), and John Whitehead's *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (1793–6). Lackington often follows the practice described by de Genlis as copying 'faithfully' from 'defenders of religion' by ensuring that 'they are marked with inverted commas, and the title of the work is quoted at the bottom of the page'.²⁸ He draws attention to the volume and page number of the quotations taken from Whitehead and from Jenkin (C., pp. 151, 134). There is a greater urgency to his use of such quotations than was apparent in his *Memoirs* – a desire that readers should follow his lead and read for themselves from the books that have had so powerful an impact on his own life.

We still find numerous excerpts of poems in *The Confessions*, many of which have inspired the author. He uses supplications and reflections from William Dodd's *Thoughts in Prison* (1777) to call for reconciliation with God in

²⁷ See Gilpin, *Sermons Preached to a Country Congregation* (London: T. Cadell, W. Davies, 1812), II, pp. 285–87.

²⁸ De Genlis, *Religion Considered As The Only Basis of Happiness And True Philosophy* (London: Payne, Cadell and Elmsley, 1787), p. xvii.

the face of death.²⁹ He also quotes from Richard Cumberland's poetic epic based on Christ's Passion, *Calvary* (1792), and Robert Blair's contemplations on death and redemption, *The Grave* (1743).³⁰

Lackington quotes from new poems as well as old favourites. He draws attention to lines that he had inserted into a 'Letter on a death-bed repentance, which was written four years since' (C., p. vii). These come from the hugely popular *The Farmer's Boy* (1800) by Robert Bloomfield, another enthusiastic autodidactic reader (C., pp. 20–21).³¹ This suggests that he was not, in fact, implacably opposed to the literary output of the 'swinish multitude' when the message of working-class writers appealed to him.

It is likely that he came across some passages of contemporary verse when reading reviews. One example, Thomas Maurice's 'Elegy, Written after Sickness and some time previous to taking Orders' (1800), was quoted in the *Monthly Review*, volume 38, (1802) and this journal is a possible source of the quotation (C., p. 123).³² Lackington also includes several extracts taken from the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). These poems were written 'with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure'.³³ He quotes from Wordsworth's 'Lines left upon a seat in a Yew Tree which stands near the lake of Esthwaite' and 'A Poet's Epitaph', and from Coleridge's 'The Foster Mother's Tale'.³⁴ These poems are all included in the 1798 first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, but Lackington

²⁹ For example, see the epigram at the opening of Letter XI, p. 54. There are further quotations by Dodd in *Confessions* on pages 1, 7, 27, 30, 39.

³⁰ See quotations in *Confessions* on pages 7, 16, 60, 69, 87, 110. and pages 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 103, 104, 105, and 111.

³¹ See review in *Critical Review* 29 (1800), pp. 66–77.

³² 'Poets Epistolary, Lyric and Elegiacal' in *Monthly Review*, 38 (1802), p. 77.

³³ This quotation from the 'Advertisement' to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* is quoted in a review of the volume in the *Critical Review*, 24 (1798) 197–204.

³⁴ See *Confessions* for quotations from 'Lines left upon a Seat', pp. 96, 109; 'A Poet's Epitaph', p. 10; 'The Foster Mother's Tale', p. 10.

probably read them in the second edition, published by Longman and Rees in 1800, which included Wordsworth's name on the title page, since he attributes 'The Foster Mother's Tale' to Wordsworth, and not to Coleridge. These examples of quotations from new and experimental poetry show that Lackington still derived pleasure from literary as well as religious writing.

There is one poem which makes more impact on *The Confessions* than any other and that is Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–6). In his *Memoirs*, Lackington had written of how he had spent his last half-a-crown, saved to buy Christmas dinner, on a copy of this staple of the old canon.³⁵ He reasoned that a dinner would be eaten by the next day, 'but should we live fifty years longer, we shall have the *Night Thoughts* to feast upon' (*M.*, 1791, pp. 135–6). Lackington included ten quotations from this long poem in his *Memoirs*. In *The Confessions*, there are more than sixty. When he writes of the process of his conversion to Christianity in Letter XIX, he spells out just how important Young's poem was in convincing him of the immortality of the soul and the need to reflect on life after death:

I for many years had doubts as to the immortality of the soul, and, at intervals, disbelieved that doctrine; but as I occasionally read the *Night Thoughts* of Dr. Young, his strong arguments in favour of the soul's immateriality and immortality, prevented me from settling in unbelief on that important article. (*C.*, p. 125)

Dick Thrifty, Lackington's sometime alter ego, also pays tribute to the extraordinary persuasive power of this poem, again recommending its confirmation of the immortality of the soul:

³⁵ St Clair shows Young to have been at the core of the old canon. See *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, pp. 525–34. Harold Forster emphasises the popularity of *Night Thoughts*, noting that Hester Thrale, Fanny Burney and Anna Seward admired it, and perhaps surprisingly given Young's assault on free-thinking and French ideas, so did the revolutionary leaders, Robespierre, Danton and Desmoulin. See Forster, *The Poet of the Night Thoughts 1683–1765* (Alburgh Harleston: Erskine Press, 1986), p. 384. As noted in Chapter 2, John Wesley included it in his Christian Library.

He could scarcely think it possible for one to continue long in the disbelief of that heart-cheering doctrine, if he would read Young's Night Thoughts with attention. (C., p. 89)

What was it about this work which so inspired Lackington? The poem was highly popular and widely read. The later sections, particularly the Seventh Night, contain a trenchant attack on free-thinking which confirm many of the opinions and prejudices Lackington expresses in *The Confessions*.³⁶ It is more difficult to imagine the writer of the *Memoirs* responding positively to the call to 'Renounce St Evremont, and read St Paul'.³⁷ At some point, however, Lackington seems to have taken up Young's challenge that 'thinking-free' is to grasp at a thought which reaches beyond the limitations imposed by human mortality and he uses the poem to persuade others of this. He inserts a quotation from the Seventh Night into Letter IV in which he recalls his own movement back to religion and appeals to the atheist and free-thinker, Jack Jolly, to change his ways:

—————Why Thought? To toil and cut,
Then make our Bed in Darkness, needs no thought.
What *superfluities* are *reasoning* Souls!
O give *Eternity!* or thought destroy.
Wretched *preferment* to this round of pains!
Wretched capacity of frenzy, *Thought!*
————— Without thought our curse were half unfelt;
Its blunted edge would spare the throbbing heart.

NIGHT THOUGHTS

(C., pp. 15–16)

³⁶Daniel W. Odell argues that *Night Thoughts* was written as a determinedly Christian response to the deist thought which Young perceived in his friend, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*. See Odell, 'Young's Night Thought as an Answer to Pope's *Essay on Man*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 12 (1972), 481–501; and Brean Hammond, 'Pope and Young on Night' in *The Enlightenment by Night: Essays on After-Dark Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Serge Soupel, Kevin L. Cope and Alexander Pettit (New York: AMS Press Inc., 2010), pp. 345–57.

³⁷Edward Young, *Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (London: A. Millar and R and J Dodsley, 1755), p. 175.

These lines urge the reader to abandon reliance on a life devoted to reason, or 'Thought', unless that reason can enable the thinker to comprehend eternal life. Young's concern about the human 'throbbing heart' reflects the emphasis placed by Wesley on the heart and feeling in religion and reinforces Lackington's re-discovered Methodist sensibilities. We learn later that Dick Thrifty particularly admires the sixth, seventh and eighth Nights because of their emphasis on the soul's immortality, but it appears that the aesthetic impact of the poem, quite as much as its message, is what moves Dick:

In general his reasoning is strong and acute; and the poetry is so beautiful, so animating, and so devout, that I can scarce read it a quarter of an hour, without feeling such delightful sensations as though my soul had already escaped from this benighted, doubting state of things, and had entered on a blissful immortality. (C., p. 90)

Lackington follows Dick's expression of admiration for Young by using the poet's own words to call on the reader to convert:

I have repeated the following lines with the author's feelings:

Believe, and shew the reason of a man;
Believe, and taste the pleasure of a god:
Believe, and look with triumph on the tomb.
(C., p. 90)³⁸

Yet it was not just the beauty of the poetry in *Night Thoughts* which roused the hearts of Lackington and Dick. Lackington wrote that he knew of no other 'four or six volumes of that size, that contain so much instruction, or would afford to me so much real pleasure' (C., pp. 91-2). Young's poem had been written as a response to the deaths of three of those closest to him. Harold Forster writes that:

These were not the calm reflections of a philosophical Augustan but the agonized search for comfort of a suffering soul; and it was exactly

³⁸ Lackington has used these lines earlier in *Confessions* on page 73 when describing the changes in Dick Thrifty following his conversion. Dick is described as being particularly animated by Lackington's reading aloud from a passage including these lines.

his insistence on the personal instead of the general that marks his work as a new departure.³⁹

The intensity of the feeling conveyed by Young seems to have moved Lackington, who had himself suffered the loss of his wife.

Inspired by reading *Night Thoughts*, Lackington relates how he was persuaded to believe in his own immortal soul after waking from a dream of 'the finest poem' he had ever encountered.⁴⁰ He reasons that this sublime creation must have been divinely inspired:

As I never saw any composition equal to that which I read in my dream; and as from the ideas which I retained of it when I awoke, it appeared a thousand times more beautiful than any thing I could compose when awake, therefore my soul must be immaterial; for otherwise I could not, while in a state of sleep, have combined and arranged such a variety of beautiful and delightful ideas as to me appeared a new creation. (C., p. 125)

Given its importance in Lackington's life, it comes as no surprise that the act of reading should have been the vehicle for persuading him of so deeply personal a facet of his identity as his soul. Similarly, it seems credible that this former bookseller and bibliophile should dream of reading.

Phyllis Mack describes how dreaming was valued amongst eighteenth-century Methodists as a 'means of experiencing a feeling of connection to the divine.'⁴¹ Dreams provided a socially acceptable form of a supernatural experience in a world where modernity was characterised by scepticism and 'enthusiasm' was mistrusted. Mack cites examples of this phenomenon, including the experience of one Methodist, Joseph Entwistle, whose dream vision is not unlike Lackington's:

³⁹ Forster, *Edward Young: The Poet of The Night Thoughts 1683–1765*, p. 180.

⁴⁰ The letter in which Lackington describes his dream ends in quotations from Night 1 and Night 7.

⁴¹ Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 221.

One night in my sleep the whole of the sixty-seventh Psalm was opened to my understanding in a most delightful way – the *bearing* of the spiritual prosperity of individual Christians and the Christian church collectively, on the conversion of the world, passed before my mind in a manner which I cannot describe. O how I was comforted and encouraged!⁴²

Mack observes that dreams generated emotion and motivated action. This reiterates the change we see in Lackington – transformed from a man dependent on rational judgement to one who allows himself to be prompted by his emotions and senses.

Reading is again the spur to faith, and poetry is shown to be particularly effective in penetrating the emotions and creating the right conditions for conversion. One day Lackington and Dick encounter ‘one of those ladies who are flying from London to Bath, from Bath to Tonbridge, from thence to Buxton, &c. in a fruitless pursuit of happiness or rather to avoid reflection’ (C., p. 105). This particular woman had been raised in a house in which the Bible was locked away and used only to record births and deaths. The two men set to work to convert her and, unsurprisingly, Dick reads passages from *Night Thoughts*, noting that ‘the good Doctor [Young] appears to have had that faith and trust in God, which every real Christian should have’ (C., p. 107). Lackington, goes on to fill pages 112 to 123 of *The Confessions* with a succession of thirty-two quotations attempting to capture a picture of heaven to engage the heart, imagination and senses of both this woman and other readers.

Some passages Lackington cites in this collection may be found under the heading ‘Heaven’ in *The British Muse. A Poetical Dictionary* is a likely source for another, showing that he still referred to these reference books. The selection is broad, with extracts of prose taken from Addison’s ‘On the Immortality of the

⁴² Joseph and Mary Entwistle, “Memorials of the kindness of our gracious God to us and our,” June 5, 1841, fos. 168–69, Diaries Collection “E” quoted in Mack, *Heart Religion*, p. 227.

Soul and a Future State' and Scott's *The Christian Life*; and poetry by writers including Young, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Samuel Wesley, Abraham Cowley, Peter Courtier, Elizabeth Rowe, William Broome, Isaac Watts, Richard Savage and Hannah More. There are more passages of poetry than prose.⁴³ Lackington describes how Dick 'began to spout away' to the society lady, giving further poetic visions of heaven, and how she acknowledges that the two men 'seemed to be acquainted with the country' and begs for 'some further account of it' (C., pp. 112–3). Once again, we see not just how Lackington uses poetry to inspire devotion, but how he constructs an account of reading, and the memorisation of literature, as playing an important role in building social as well as spiritual relationships.

The final pages of *The Confessions* become markedly more devotional. Lackington includes a selection of passages taken from the Old and New Testaments. He includes italicised quotations and paraphrases from the Bible throughout *The Confessions*, but Letter XXIX contains a concentration of these passages as the voice of the author begins to give way to the authoritative voice of the Church.⁴⁴ We find selections from Pauline Epistles; Psalm 141; a reference to the confession in the *Book of Common Prayer* and to the Ninth of the Thirty-Nine Articles; and to the Books of Proverbs, Job and Jeremiah (C., pp. 185–91).

The final letters in *The Confessions* contain numerous quotations from Methodist hymns selected from John Wesley's *Collection of Hymns For the Use of the People Called Methodist* (1780). This collection aimed to provide

⁴³ Compare quotations on page 114 of *The Confessions* attributed to 'Shirley's St Patrick' and 'Crowne's Regulus' by Lackington to those listed under 'Heaven' in Thomas Hayward's *The British Muse*, 2 vols. (London: F Cogan for J. Nourse, 1738), II, pp. 37–8; and 'Rowe's Fair Penitent' under 'Happiness', *A Poetical Dictionary*, 4 vols. (London: J. Newberry et. al, 1761), II., p. 99.

⁴⁴ See, for example, C., pp. 84, 109, 112.

congregations with 'a little body of experimental and practical divinity'.⁴⁵

'Experimental' here denotes 'based on experience', and the distinction between this usage and our modern definition of the testing of an hypothesis, is important, as Françoise Deconinck-Biossard observes:

Hymns offer a good model of dynamic interaction between reader and text. The repeated experience of congregational hymn-singing, or of reading devotional poetry for the purpose of private meditation, often leads singers or readers to appropriate hymns as part of their personal culture. The regularity of rhyme and metre, and the repetition of the tune from one stanza to the next, allow the verse to be memorized – perhaps subconsciously – by an individual or communal readers, who often share the author's theological perspective.⁴⁶

Hymns represent the synthesis of the emotional, devotional and communal possibilities of literature which Lackington had begun to value and they make for an appropriate conclusion to *The Confessions*.

Persuading Others

So far this chapter has focused on the ways in which Lackington used his reading to nurture his own spiritual faith, although we have also seen ways in which he consciously attempted to share this with others. He used reading as a primary tool to convince others to embrace Christianity.

Lackington describes his correspondence with various old acquaintances informing them of his rejection of free-thinking. These include Mr. D, or Mr Dingle, the second husband of his former mistress Mary Bowden, 'Tom Thoughtless', and J.B. Lackington had recently seen the last of these 'stretched on a wretched bed, groaning under the aches and pains of disease', but it is his

⁴⁵ J. R. Watson, 'The Hymns of Isaac Watts and the Tradition of Dissent' in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*, ed. by Isabel Rivers and David L. Wyles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 33–67 (p. 46). See also, Nicholas Temperley, 'The Music of Dissent', pp. 197–228.

⁴⁶ Françoise Deconinck-Biossard, 'The Circulation and Reception of Philip Doddridge's Hymns' in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*, pp. 68–94 (p. 68).

friend's spiritual welfare which most concerns him since he fears he may, by his own example, have led him away from religion years earlier. As already discussed, J.B. had put aside his scepticism and greatly valued the New Testament, but Lackington presses him to borrow other works to 'help to establish you in the belief of the truth of Divine Revelation' (C., pp. 33, 35). These include core texts which, as we have already seen, Lackington valued, such as Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, Butler's *The Analogy of Religion*, Jenkin's *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, as well as works by Richard Bentley, Joseph Addison, Beilby Porteus, and Richard Watson. This is just one of many instances of Lackington's recommending these texts to readers. He describes reading these books with his wife, recommends them to correspondent, 'Tom Thoughtless', and cites them as examples of books to dispel doubt (See C., pp. 52, 68, and 131–2).

He took more direct action in disseminating key texts by giving them away to his neighbours. In Letter XX, he writes that he might never have read Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* had he not 'met with a pirated edition of it, (the whole being printed in one volume duodecimo, on decent paper,) which I bought bound, for three and sixpence' (C., p. 131). Lackington goes on to complain about book trade practices aimed at spacing out texts in order to charge more for books:

The work in question might be handsomely printed in one volume (instead of two) octavo, for such as wish for a handsome edition; and for such as wish to have it cheap, it might be printed on a decent paper, in duodecimo, and sold bound for 3s 6d. were this done, there would be no bounds to the sale of it, as thousands would be given away; and very great good done; and the publisher would in the end get more by it. (C., p. 131)

Lackington clearly still held to the principle of reducing the cost of books in order to sell more copies. He recognised a need to supply the poor with the right

sort of reading material, writing that 'we should put proper books into their hands and never be tired or discouraged' (C., p. 37). He urged 'those who could afford it' to purchase tracts 'against infidel principles as are published at a low price and disperse them as much as possible wherever they are likely to do good' (C., p. 45). He ordered three thousand tracts from the Religious Tract Society which he believed to be 'well calculated to awaken my poor neighbours in the villages around, to a sense of their wicked way of life' to give away to 'farmers, labourers, soldiers, &c' (C., p. 165). He also bought cheap editions of seminal religious texts to give away, including Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* so admired by Dick Thrifty, William Melmoth's *The Great Importance of a Religious Life Considered* (1711), Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658) which he had read as a young man, Christopher Brown's *Itinerarium Novi Testamenti* (1748), and William Gilpin's *The Lives of John Trueman, Richard Atkins, etc.* (1791).

This last work, written by vicar and schoolmaster, William Gilpin, whose sermons Lackington read and admired, is a heavy-handed moral tale illustrating the consequences of good and bad behaviour. Trueman lives a godly, righteous and sober life and is rewarded, whereas Atkins, and his dreadful sister, are motivated by lust and greed and die lingering gangrenous deaths. Gilpin, who included hints on sermon-writing for younger clergy in his *Sermons Preached to a Country Congregation* (1799), writes in a deliberately plain style so as to be understood by those in his parish in the New Forest.

Lackington, with his experience of book-selling, was similarly realistic in his expectation of what his neighbours might read. He therefore 'lent Robinson Crusoe's Adventures, and some other moral and entertaining works' to young

men he thought 'would not read religious books', reasoning that reading would keep them occupied in the winter evenings and 'prevent them from spending their evenings in bad company' (C., p. 163). To young women he lent *The Workhouse* and Mary Martha Sherwood's *The History of Susan Gray* (1802). *Susan Gray* offers readers a tale quite as cautionary as Gilpin's and was written specifically for young girls going in to service to warn them of the dangers of vanity, flirtation and aspiring to a life beyond their station. F. J. Harvey Darton describes its author as 'the most intense moralist of them all'.⁴⁷ Francis Wrangham, a correspondent in the *The Gentleman's Magazine*, recommended a selection of books similar to those listed by Lackington to be lent to the 'cottager' so that he might be 'lured back from the alehouse corner' to read with or to be read to by his family'.⁴⁸ Both Wrangham and Lackington appear to have invested considerable faith in the power of reading to dispel domestic boredom and knit families together during the long winter evenings when outdoor work and much indoor work was impractical because of darkness and poor lighting.

Conclusion

We find in *The Confessions* a picture of reading as a mainstay of Lackington's retirement. He writes of spending time walking, working in his garden and reading until he was tired (C., p. 18). Not only does reading contribute to his

⁴⁷ F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England* (London and New Castle: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 1999), p. 160. It was thought that no copy of *Susan Gray* survived, but *Literary Heritage, West Midlands* has recently produced an online copy of the text, <http://www3.shropshire-cc.gov.uk/Sherwood.htm>, [accessed 26 September 2011]. I have as yet found no copy of *The Workhouse*.

⁴⁸ Francis Wrangham, 'On Country Libraries for the Poor', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1817) 292–295 (p. 293). Wrangham was a writer, bibliophile and Church of England clergyman who, amongst other philanthropic causes, campaigned for charity schools and established a free library for his parishioners in Hunmanby. See David Kaloustian, 'Wrangham, Francis (1769–1842)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30009 [accessed 7 January 2014].

spiritual awakening, but it appears to play an important part in the relationships he builds with his wife, with old friends from his youth, and with new acquaintances. We encounter a more emotional man than the author of the *Memoirs*, one whose reading encourages him to abase his reasoning self before God, to cry out, to repent. He is a man who, through reading, finds himself 'more in love with Christianity' (C., p. 52). Crucially, however, reading religious works elicits more than an emotional response. Lackington changes his behaviour and embarks on a series of good works, building chapels and reaching out to other readers to follow his example. By these means, he hoped to reverse what he believed was a rising tide of infidelity and establish sound foundations for morality in England.

CONCLUSION

Like many seventeenth-century religious writers, Lackington recognised the power of print to extend beyond the grave and geographical limitations to reach out to readers. Like them, he made use of the enduring power of print to 'speak . . . among whom [he] cannot . . . be' and he created a narrative of his secular conversion to the redeeming power of literature in order to sell reading and, ultimately, books.¹ In later years, he was to employ the more conventional form of confessional narrative to try to win the same readers back to religion. His principal tool in persuading these readers, was, characteristically, the power of poetry to stir the heart, although he also set out a programme of reading designed to convince those wavering in their faith to embrace Christianity.

The personal testimonies of writers such as Bunyan, or the various autobiographers whose accounts of spiritual struggles were published by Wesley, conveyed more than records of their own individual experiences. They also stood as memorials to their authors. Lackington had no children to carry his name to future generations and although he took into his business George Lackington, the son of his cousin, Charles (variously a coal merchant, a dealer in glass, china and earthen ware, and a gentleman), he decided not to leave his fortune to him or his descendants.² The *Memoirs* is an attempt to build the type of monument to self that is identified by James Olney in his study of autobiography. We know that Lackington cherished hopes of a mention in future Biographical Dictionaries and

¹ Shepard, *The Sound Believer*, dedication. See above, pp. 62–3.

² Insurance records state that Charles Lackington of St Albans Street was a dealer in glass, china and earthen ware in 1777 and a 'gent.' by 1787. See LMA, SUN 1 254 22/07/80 BN. Brenda J. Scragg refers to Charles as a coal merchant in her article on George Lackington, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15842> [accessed 13 May 2012].

also that in 1796 he had applied to erect a brass statue of himself in the middle of Finsbury Square.³ He was not averse to the memorialising of his own achievements.

As always, there was more to his self-publicising than simply vanity. The *Memoirs* stands not just as a monument to Lackington the man, but also to his reading. The many literary references introduce or re-acquaint readers with old canon poetry and drama, philosophical works as well as contemporary writers. The knowing reflections on taste and reading habits, such as Lackington's account of the assortment of readers who seek different types of books, both guide and inform. Indeed, the *Memoirs* can be read as a form of conduct literature commenting on how to transform life through reading. Lackington addresses his advice not to a son or daughter, as did Chesterfield and Gregory, but to countless unknown young men and women who could benefit as he had done. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, one writer had advised his son that he should seek to own a few of the very best books and that he should strive to retain the knowledge they contained in his head. He quipped that 'if Books would make a Scholar, the Bookseller might bear the Bell [an academic prize]'.⁴ This advice was out-of-date by the end of the century as print circulation rose and Lackington clearly promotes book ownership as a means of getting on in society. He might not have won 'the Bell' but he achieved wealth, renown, and access to a seemingly endless source of entertainment through reading as a bookseller.

Lackington's contemporary reputation was a complicated one. He was the subject of satire in poems such as 'The Temple of Folly' (1795) and in Peregrine Pindar's 'Ode to the Hero of Finsbury Square' (1795). Pindar takes delight in

³ See, *Gazeteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 21 June, 1796. This request was turned down.

⁴ *Advice to a Son, Directing Him How to Demean Himself in the Most Important Passages of Life* (London: W. Taylor, 1716), pp. 15–16.

Figure 17: illustration from Peregrine Pindar's 'Ode to the Hero of Finsbury Square'

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ridiculing elements of the *Memoirs* and some of Lackington's more audacious acts of self-promotion such as his desire to raise his own statue, but his verse nonetheless reflects Lackington's achievements:

And, hail to thee (to Fame and Fortune leading),
 OLD INDUSTRY! That doth such marv'lous Things;
 That scatter'th such a Rage for Books and Reading,
 And eke transformeth Coblers into Kings:
 Oh! Wouldst thou smile upon my humble Labours,
 I might, in Time, get wealthy – like my Neighbours.⁵

An illustration accompanying the poem is not designed to flatter the bookseller, but nevertheless emphasises Lackington's key business objectives, drawing attention to his claim that his shop was the cheapest in the world and that he conducted trade on the basis of 'small profits' (see Figure 17). The picture shows him climbing into his carriage, clutching a copy of his *Memoirs*, whilst his pocket contains 'puffs and lies' promoting it and a small dog defecates on a further copy lying in the road. He steps on a pile of three books – the Book of Common Prayer, the Bible, and a work by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson – watched by a crowd of laughing grotesques. This apparent act of careless blasphemy reflects Lackington's claim that he had built his business on buying up large quantities of religious texts such as 'Watts's Psalms' (*M.*, p. 391).⁶ In view of the importance of the Bible in helping Lackington to learn to read, the image conveys more than the illustrator perhaps intended.

There is plenty of evidence that the wider public, including readers and commentators, responded to Lackington's efforts to encourage others to follow his example and achieve great things. David Rivers, writing in 1798, noted not only the novelty of Lackington's efforts, but also their effect:

⁵ Peregrine Pindar, *Ode to the Hero of Finsbury Square Congratulatory on His Late Marriage and Illustrative of His Genius As His Own Biographer* (London: I. Herbert, 1795), p. 24.

⁶ Lackington writes of having in his possession at one time as many as ten thousand copies of 'Watts's Psalms' and the same number of his 'Hymns'.

LACKINGTON, JAMES.

A Bookseller in Finsbury Square, who, by dint of good luck and ready money, has raised himself to a conspicuous station in the trade. He published in 1791, *Memoirs of the first forty-five Years of his Life*, in an octavo volume, which, owing to the novelty of the thing, had a tolerable successful sale, and has been reprinted in different sizes. It is a queer hoche poche, but cannot be said to be without its moral uses to the community, as it traces the progress of industry from the lowest poverty to the attainment of a respectable consideration in Life.⁷

The Reading Experience Database records evidence from two young men who valued Lackington's *Memoirs* in just this way. Joseph Hunter noted in his journal on 26 June 1797 that he 'went to Mr Gales to order two book [sic] which I saw at Birmingham [. . .] I bought the "Life of Lackington" from the Library who begun trade with #5 & now sells 100,000 volumes annually.'⁸ Hunter's reference to the tag Lackington included beneath his portrait in some editions of his *Memoirs*, suggests that he was drawn to the 'rags to riches' narrative of Lackington's autobiography and the rewards it promised.

Another young reader, similarly inspired, was James Glass Bertram, an apprentice working in a book warehouse, who later wrote:

Another book I read with much zest was the autobiography of Lackington, the bookseller, a copy of which amusing and instructive work I still possess and read occasionally.⁹

These lines are included in Bertram's own memoirs, which echoes Lackington's from time to time, particularly through the author's obvious love of reading. The following passage recalls Lackington's motivation for going into bookselling:

As a country boy at a time when books were anything but plentiful in such poor homes as my father's, I used to think no life could be more enjoyable than that of a bookseller or printer with probably little to do

⁷ David Rivers, *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors in Great Britain* (London: R. Faulder, 1798), p. 354.

⁸ Joseph Hunter, *Journal*, British Library, Add 24, 879, 11, http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=10802, [accessed: 13 May 2013].

⁹ James Glass Bertram, *Some Memories of Books, Authors and Events*, (Westminster, 1893), p. 28, http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=8197, [accessed: 13 May 2013].

but pass half the day in reading the “Arabian Nights”, or narratives of the adventures of shipwrecked sailors.¹⁰

Bertram was to find that life as an apprentice was not quite so charmed, but he must have enjoyed his work for he went on to manage Tait’s *Edinburgh Magazine*. He developed a taste for reading biography and joined a Mechanics’ Library to access books. His favourites whilst an apprentice also included ‘Cobbett’s Advice to Young Men’ and ‘Charles Knight’s Pursuits of Knowledge Under Difficulties’.¹¹ He was exactly the type of young reader Lackington aimed to inspire.

The *Memoirs* were similarly taken up by other readers. One-time fellow shoemaker, Methodist and autodidact, Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, included a summary of Lackington’s life in his book, *The Triumphs of Perseverance and Enterprise: Recorded as Examples for the Young* (1854). Cooper, like Lackington, returned to preaching in later life, touring the country to lecture on religious subjects.¹² Richard Alfred Davenport, author and publisher, also included Lackington as an example of one of his *Lives of Individuals Who Raised Themselves From Poverty to Eminence or Fortune* (1841). His book was published by Thomas Tegg, an enterprising publisher and bookseller who, like Lackington, built his business on selling remaindered books. Tegg also produced *A Present For An Apprentice*, a volume serving the same function as the many young men’s companions promoted by Lackington in his catalogues.

Lackington’s influence and example lived on well into the nineteenth century.¹³

¹⁰ James Glass Bertram, *Some Memories of Books, Authors and Events* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co, 1893), pp. 1–2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–8.

¹² See Stephen Roberts, ‘Cooper, Thomas (1805–1892), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6232 [accessed 13 May 2013].

¹³ It should be noted that Davenport and Bertram have not enjoyed unsullied reputations. Davenport died in squalor and poverty - a laudanum addict; and Bertram dabbled in pornography - his *Flagellation and the Flagellants: The History of the Rod in All Countries* (1910) was

As a bookseller, we know from the evidence of Thomas Jefferson's purchases that Lackington sold books abroad as well as at home and that his stringent refusal to give credit, did not deter purchasers from overseas. Another well-known customer was the author Charlotte Smith, who used Lackington and Allen to exchange parcels of books whilst she was living in Tunbridge Wells. She was disappointed to receive 'Anatomy of Melancholy, & two or 3 old books of Jeremy Taylors which are not what I meant' after she had dispatched *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Phillip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to His Son* and Lyttleton's *History of the Life of King Henry the Second* (4 vols), all in good condition.¹⁴ This transaction took place in 1801 after Lackington had retired, but it draws attention to the service (albeit not good in this instance) which the shop offered to readers wanting to access a new selection of books by trading those they had already read.

The account of reading that Lackington gives in *The Confessions* confirms many of the claims he makes in his *Memoirs*. He describes a country in which the political instincts of young working-class readers had begun to be awakened. Men like Cooper, some inspired by Lackington's example of endeavour, others fired by more radical influences such as Thomas Spence's *Pig's Meat*, were starting to demand political reform.¹⁵ The 'Two Letters' added to *The*

published under the pseudonym, William M. Cooper. See H.J. Spencer, 'Davenport, Richard Alfred (1776/7–1852)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7203 [accessed 18 January 2014]. Thomas Tegg, meanwhile, attracted criticism for selling books which had gone out of copyright at reduced prices. Thomas Carlyle contributed to discussions about the extension of the period of copyright by writing to the House of Lords to demand that 'all Thomas Teggs' should be prevented from being able to 'steal' author's profits. See James J. Barnes and Patience P Barnes, 'Tegg, Thomas (1776–1846)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27102 [accessed 18 January 2014].

¹⁴ Judith Stanton, ed., *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 354–5.

¹⁵ Cooper was not born until 1805, but as this thesis illustrates Charles Pigott was demanding in the eighteenth-century that authorities abided by the terms of the 'Magna Charta'.

Confessions presents Lackington's vision of the consequences of women's expectations being raised by reading.

We see that reading did not simply enable James Lackington to raise himself socially to the rank of gentleman and make a fortune through the book business; it also informed his very identity. He sold an image of himself as one recreated by learning to read and this picture was to resonate through the next two centuries, inspiring men like Bertram, Cooper and Davenport throughout the political reforms of the nineteenth century and providing material for lucrative 'plunder' for the historian in the twentieth century. The same reviewer, writing in 1893 of the wearying effect of Lackington's many quotations, goes on to identify how extraordinarily receptive to the many influences and opportunities afforded by reading this writer and businessman was:

Hitherto he had remained a member of the Revivalist Connection, but a new light came to him, chiefly through the perusal of Amory's "Life of John Bunce." If there has been any doubt as to our hero's remarkable character this confessions will surely suffice to dispel it. A man who can dine on "Young's Night Thoughts," and become a philosopher through the study of "John Bunce," is certainly not cast in a common mould.¹⁶

Lackington was not cast in the common mould. His autobiographies reveal a man whose intellectual curiosity and determination inspired him to become an exceptional reader. His reading became the source of his business, a means of social advancement, a comfort in old age as well as providing spiritual nourishment. Put simply, learning to read transformed his life and the lives of others.

¹⁶ 'The Father of Cheap Literature', *Bow Bells* (1893), 463–464.

Appendix A

A 'very good library'

This list attempts to identify the books which Lackington records as belonging to his and John Jones's 'very good library'. Where it has been difficult to identify items, a selection of possible titles is given.

Adams, Thomas, *The White Devil* (London: Mab, 1613)

— *A Commentary or Exposition upon the Divine Second Epistle Generall Written by the Blessed Apostle St Peter* (London: Bloome, 1633)

Alleine, Joseph, *A Sure Guide to Heaven* (London: Parkhurst, 1688)

Baxter, Richard, *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live* (London: R.W. for Nevill Simmons, 1658)

Brooks, Thomas, *Heaven on Earth* (London: Hancock, 1660) later published as *A Treatise on Assurance* (Edinburgh: Mackay, 1777)

Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Ponder, 1678)

— *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved* (London: Larkin, 1689)

— *The Heavenly Footman* (London: Doe, 1698)

— *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: Larkin, 1666)

— *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (London: Ponder, 1680)

— *The Holy War* (London: Newman, 1682)

Bunyan, William, *An Effectual Shove to the Heavy Arse Christian* (London: J. Roson, 1768)

Calamy, Edmund, *The Godly Man's Ark* (London: Hancock, 1657)

Charnock, Stephen, *A Treatise of Divine Providence* (London: Cockeril, 1680)

Coles, Elisha, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty* (London: E.C., 1673)

Collyer, Mary, *The Death of Abel* (London: Dodsley, 1761)

Dent, Arthur, *The Plaine Mans Path Way to Heaven* (London: Dexter, 1601)

Durham, James, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* (Glasgow: Sanders, 1685)

— *A Commentary Upon the Book of Revelations* (Glasgow: Sanders, 1685)

Erskine, Ralph, *Gospel Sonnets* (Edinburgh: Briggs, 1726)

Gay, John, *Fables* (Dublin: 1727)

Hall, John, *Jacob's Ladder* (London: Crouch, 1678)

Hervey, James, *Meditations Among the Tombs* (London: Rivington, 1746)

— *Theron and Aspasio* (London: Rivington, 1755)

Hobbes, Thomas, *The Iliads and Odysses of Homer* (London: Crook, 1677)

Manton, Thomas, *A Practical Commentary* (London: Fawne, 1651)

Mead, Matthew, *The Almost Christian Discovered* (London: Parkhurst, 1662)

Member of the Church of England, *Heaven's Vengeance* (London: Gardner, 1747)

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* (London: Parker, 1667)

Pemle, William, *The Works* (London: Bartlet, 1629)

Pearse, Edward, *The Best Match or the Soul's Espousal to Christ* (London: Robinson, 1673)

Polhill, Edward, *Precious Faith Considered in its Nature, Working and Growth* (London: Cockerill, 1675)

— *The Divine Will Considered in its Eternal Decrees and Holy Execution* (London: Eversden, 1673)

Pomfret, John, *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Place, 1702)

Reynolds, John, *The Triumph of God's Revenge against the Crying and Execrable Sinne of Murther* (London: Kyngston, 1622)

Rogers, Timothy, *The Righteous Man's Evidences for Heaven* (London: Brewster, 1619) or *Good News from Heaven* (London: Brewster, 1627)

Shepard, Thomas, *The Sincere Convert* (London: Symmons, 1640)

— *The Sound Believer* (Edinburgh: Bryson, 1645)

Southwell, Robert, *Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears* (London: Brown, 1770)

Wall, John, *None but Christ* (London: Smith, 1648)

Watson, Thomas, *Heaven Taken by Storm* (London: Parkhurst, 1669)

Wilcox, Thomas, *A Guide to Eternal Glory* (London: Crouch, 1676)

Walker, Ellis, trans., *Epicteti Enchiridion* (London: Keble, 1692)

Divine Breathings of a devout soul – possibly one of:

Sherman, Thomas, *Divine Breathings* (London: Pawlett, 1671)

Beart, John, *Divine Breathings* (London: Clark, 1716)

Taylor, James, *The Pious Soul's Divine Breathings* (London: Blare, 1702)

The Faith of God's Elect – possibly one of:

Gregson, Moses, *The Faith of God's Elect* (London: Buckland, 1760)

Johnson, John, *The Faith of God's Elect* ((Liverpool: E. Owen, 1754)

Owen, John, *Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect* (London: Marshal, 1695)

The Three Steps to Heaven - possibly

A Guide from the Cradel to the Grave, Being a companion for young and old ... to which is added the three great steps to eternal salvation: as faith, to be our guide, hope, to be our comfort and charity to hide a multitude of faults (London: Midwinter, 1731)

John Wesley's Sermons, Journals, Tracts, etc. (various and numerous)

Aristotle's Master-piece (London: How, 1690)

Collings' Divine Cordial for the Soul

Young's Short and Sure Guide to Salvation

(possibly a 'small godly book', see Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, p. 262.)

Appendix B

Sources for Quotations and References to Books Used by James Lackington

The sources of quotations included in the *Memoirs* and *The Confessions* are provided below, listed alphabetically by author. Also included in this list are the titles of books referred to in these autobiographies.

Lackington drew quotations from a range of sources including books, journals, dictionaries and ephemera. In some instances he relied upon memory and his own notes, adapting favourite lines to suit his own purposes. It is impossible, in most cases, to ascertain the exact edition from which he quotes so I have given the date of first publication of many items and the source from which I have found quotations for some. I have suggested possible sources in anthologies or miscellanies, such as *The British Muse* (1738), *The Art of English Poetry* (1702), *A Poetical Dictionary* (1761) where appropriate, indicated within square brackets. In some instances these are interchangeable so Lackington may have favoured one or more when searching for quotations. Similarly, he appears to have taken classical aphorisms, not from the originals, but from the works of more recent writers. I have listed these sources as I have come across them.

The following abbreviations are used:

M *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington*
 Memoirs of the Forty-Five First Years of the Life of James Lackington

C *The Confessions of James Lackington*

Adams, Thomas, *The White Devil: or The Hypocrite Uncased* (1613) (*M*, 1791: 91; 1792: 171; 1794: 164; 1795: 95)

— *A Commentary or Exposition upon the Divine Second Epistle Generall written by the Blessed Apostle St Peter* (London: Bloome, 1633) (*M*, 1791: 91; 1792: 171; 1794: 164; 1795: 95)

Adams, William, 'The Lord's Prayer' in *The Duties of Industry, Frugality and Sobriety* (1770). (*M*, 1792: 198; 1794: 194; 1795: 116)

Addison, Joseph, *Spectator*, 201 (1711) (*M*, 1792: 91; 1794: 77; 1795: 47)

— *The Evidences of the Christian Religion* (1730) (*C*: 35, 52, 68, 163, 184)

— *Cato: A Tragedy* (1713) (*M*, 1791: 176; 1792: 267; 1794: 278; 1795: 163; *C*: 116, 126)

— 'On the Immortality of the Soul and a Future State' in David Hume, *Essays on Suicide and the Immortality of the Soul* (1799) (*C*: 119)

Aeschylus, trans. by Robert Potter, 'Agamemnon', *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (1779) (*C*: 94, 205)

—, trans. by Robert Potter, 'The Furies', *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (1779) (C: 11)

Akenside, Mark, 'Ode IV: A Gentleman whose Mistress had married an Old Man', *Odes on Several Subjects* (1745) (M, 1792: 176; 1794: 169; 1795: 98)

— 'Ode V: Hymn to Cheerfulness, the Author Sick', *Odes on Several Subjects* (1745) (M, 1792: 484; 1794: 528; 1795: 317)

Alleine, Joseph, *A Sure Guide to Heaven* (1688) (M, 1791: 92; 1792: 171; 1794: 164; 1795: 95)

Allestree, Richard, *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658) (C: 75, 163)

Amory, Thomas, *The Life of John Bunclie Esq.* (1756-63) (M, 1791: 165-6; 1792: 253; 1794: 261; 1795: 154; C: 4)

Anacreon, 'Ode II', *The Works of Anacreon and Sappho* (1768) (M, 1794: 491; 1795: 292)

— 'Ode XV', *The Works of Anacreon and Sappho* (1768) (M, 1795: 82)

— 'Ode XXIV', *The Works of Anacreon and Sappho* (1768) (M, 1794: 260; 1795: 153)

'An old imperfect volume of Receipts in Physic, Surgery, &c' (M, 1791: 40; 1792: 91; 1794: 76; 1795: 46)

Anon, 'Humanity', *Modern Poems* (1776) (M, 1792: 406; 1794: 448; 1795: 267)

Anon, 'The Happy Fireside', *The Most Agreeable Companion* (1782) (M, 1794: 191; 1795: 113)

Anon, 'An Ode Sung at the Anniversary Meeting of a Very Worthy and Antient Fraternity', *Miscellaneous Poems by Several Hands* (1730) (M, 1794: 530; 1795: 319)

Anstey, Christopher, *The New Bath Guide* (1766) (M, 1792: 236, 241; 1794: 236, 243; 1795: 139, 143)

Ariosto, trans. by Henry Boyd, 'A Specimen of a New Translation of the Orlando Furioso of Ariosto by Henry Boyd' in *A Translation of the Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (1785) (M, 1794: 227, 321; 1795: 133, 186).

—, trans. by Samuel Humphreys, 'La Coupe Enchantée, or The Enchanted Cup' in *Tales and Novels in Verse From the French of La Fontaine by Several Hands* (1735) (M, 1795: 34, 140).

Aristotle's Master-piece (1690) (M, 1791: 92; 1792: 171; 1794: 164; 1795: 95)

Arley, 'An Evening's contemplation, written in a garden', *The British Album* (1790) (M, 1795: 257, 280)

— 'An Occasional Epilogue Written for the Benefit of A Country Player', *The British Album* (1790) (M, 1795: 262)

— 'The complaint: to Lord ****', *The British Album* (1790) (M, 1795: 267)

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¹⁷ In *The British Muse* this excerpt is credited to Dekker, not Marston.

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— *The Castle of Indolence* (1748) (M, 1794: 171, 244; 1795: 100, 143)

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— 'The Three Manners', *The Works*, translated by Smollett and Francklin (1761–81) (M, 1795: 86)

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— 'Psalm XVII', *The Works* (1753) (C: 115)

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— *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) (M, 1791: 40; 1792: 91; 1794: 76; 1795: 46)

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— (ed.), 'I Will Hearken What the Lord' (C: 162)

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Wesley, John & Charles, 'Let the World their Virtue Boast' (C: 170)

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- 'Jesus Let Thy Pitying Eye' (C: 187)
- 'Thou Hidden Source of Calm Repose' (C: 168)
- 'The Lord is King and Earth Submits' (C: 169)
- 'Jesus the Name High Over All' (C: 172, 173, 174)
- 'Ye Neighbours and Friends of Jesus Draw Near' (C: 175)
- 'Author of Faith Eternal Word' (C: 184)
- 'Ah Lord with Trembling I Confess' (C: 184)
- 'And Am I Only Born to Die' (C: 186)
- 'Let Us Join ('Tis God Commands)' (C: 190)
- 'Weary of Wandering From My God' (C: 192)
- 'Sinners Turn Why Will Ye Die' (C: 192)
- 'Christ From Whom All Blessings Flow' (C: 194)

Wesley, Samuel, 'On Some Blasphemous Discourses on Our Saviour's Miracles' (C: 75)

- 'The Parish Priest: A Poem Upon a Clergyman Lately Deceased' (C: 118)
- 'To a Friend in the Country', *Poems on Several Occasions* (1736) (C: 199)

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- 'On Friendship', *The Works of the English Poets*, LXXII (M, 1795: 104, 127)
- 'To the Rev Mr Wright', *The Works of the English Poets*, LXXII (M, 1795: 104, 216, 239, 256)
- 'To the Rev Dr. Lowth on his life of William of Wykeham', *The Works of the English Poets*, LXXII (M, 1795: 148)
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— *Conjectures on Original Composition in a letter to the author of Sir Charles Grandison* (1759) (*M*, 1795: 270)

— 'Epistle 1', *Two Epistles to Mr Pope* (1730) (*M*, 1792: 380; 1794: 412; 1795: 238)

— *Resignation* (1761) (*M*, 1791: 120; 1792, 201; 1794: 197; 1795: 117)

— *The Complaint: Or Night Thoughts On Life, Death and Immortality* (1742–46)

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Night Two (*M*, 1792: 106; 1794: 93; 1795: 55; *C*: 51, 96, 101, 202–3)

Night Four (*M*, 1791: 260; 1792: 395, 467; 1794: 261, 433, 510; 1795: 153, 257, 307; *C*: 5, 31, 33, 50, 61, 67, 72, 75, 78, 90, 91, 107, 107, 117, 130, 162, 168, 169, 171, 179)

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Night Six (*C*: 112, 124)

Night Seven (*C*: 6, 11, 15, 27, 38, 43, 54, 75, 76, 76, 89, 95, 102, 104, 104, 127, 129)

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Zimmerman, Johan Georg, *Solitude Considered with Respect to its Influence on the Mind and the Heart*, translated by J.B. Mercier (1791) (*M*, 1795: 270, 303)

Appendix C

Books published by James Lackington to 1797

Nicholas Culpeper, *The English Physician Enlarged* (London: Printed for Lackington and Denis; and Patrick Anderson, Edinburgh, 1778)

Benjamin Worship, *An Address to Britons* (London: printed and sold by R. Hawes, 1779; sold also by Mess. Denis and Son; by Mr. Lackington, Mr. Chase, at Norwich; Mr. Eaton, at Yarmouth; [and 1 each in Bury and Ipswich, 1779]

Francis Okely, trans., *The Divine Visions of John Engelbrecht* (Northampton: printed by Thomas Dicey for the translator; and for J. Lackington; J. Denis & Son; T. Mills, at Bristol; sold also by J. Binns, at Leeds, 1780)

L. Watkins, *The Christian Warrior and Scriptural Pilgrim: A Poem* (London: printed by H. Pace for the author, and sold by Mr. Lackington; the Bible; and at Mr Groves, Bristol, 1779)

Francis Okely, trans., *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial and Wonderful Writings of Jacob Behmen* (Northampton: printed for Tho. Dicey for the translator, and for J. Lackington. Sold also at Bristol by T. Mills, and at Leeds by J. Binns, 1780)

Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, (London: printed for J. Lackington; and J. Barker, 1780)

Hendrik Jansen, trans. by Francis Okely *A Faithful Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with Hiel* (Northampton: Printed by Thomas Dicey for the translator; and sold by J. Lackington; J. Denis and Son, London; T. Mills, at Bristol; and J. Binns, at Leeds, 1781)

Francis Okely *The Indispensible Necessity of Faith in Order to the Pleasing God* (Northampton: Printed by Thomas Dicey for the author, and sold by J. Lackington; J. Denis and Son; T. Mills, at Bristol; and J. Binns, at Leeds, 1781)

Thomas Simes, *A Portable Military Library*, 4 vols (London: printed for the author; and sold by Bew; Becket; Debrett; Dodsley; Durham; Faulder; Flexney; Shepperson and Reynolds; Booth, Norwich; Lackington; and Richardson and Urquhart, 1782)

Francis Okely, *Certain Select Passages of the New Testament Metrically Paraphrased* (Northampton: printed for Tho. Dicey and Co. for the author; and sold by J. Lackington, J. Denis and Son; T. Mills, at Bristol; and J. Binns, at Leeds, 1783)

Francis Okely, *The Disjointed Watch* (Northampton: printed by Tho. Dicey and

Co for the author; and sold by J. Lackington; J. Denis and Son, London; T. Mills, at Bristol; and J. Binns, at Leeds, 1783) A second edition of this was published in Bristol by William Pine and sold by Lackington, Mills, & Hazard, 1789

Samuel How, *The Sufficiency of the Spirit's Teaching without Human Learning* (London: J. Lackington, 1783)

The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politicks, and Literature, for the Year 1758 (London: printed by assignment from J. Dodsley, for W. Otridge and son; R. Faulder; Cuthell and Martin; J. Nunn; Lackington, Allen and Co.,; E. Jeffrey; and Vernor, Hood and Sharpe, [1783])

The date of the listing is probably incorrect since Lackington, Allen and Co did not come into existence until 1793/4.

Jean-Françoise Marmontel, *Belisarius*. (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1784)

A Dissertation or Discourse on Suicide (Northampton: Printed for Thomas Dicey and Co. for the author, and sold by J. Lackington; J. Denis, London; T. Mills, at Bristol; J. Binns, at Leeds, 1785)

Voltaire, *The Philosophical Dictionary* (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1785)

The Plays of William Shakespeare, 7 vols (London: many booksellers, 1786-1790)

Peter Schouten, *A Treatise, published by the Society of Edam for the good of the Public in answer to the proposed question what arguments do Nature and Reason afford for the Existence of God* (London: for the translator; and sold by Mr. Buckland; Mr. King; Mr. Lackington; Mr. Watts; and Mr. Scollick, 1787)

James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, 4 vols (Perth: printed by R. Morison for R. Morison and Son; J. Lackington, London; and J. Binns, Leeds, 1787)

The British Songster Being a Select Collection of Three Hundred & Fourteen Favourite English and Scotch Songs, Catches &c (London: Printed for J. Lackington, 1788)

Edward Young, *Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality, and the Last Day, a Poem*. (London: printed for J. Lackington and J. Barker, 1788)

James Hervey, *Meditations and Contemplations*, 2 vols (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1788)

Archibald McLean, *A Letter on the Sonship of Christ* (Edinburgh: printed , and sold by M. Gray, Edinburgh; J. Duncan, and Mrs. Orr, Glasgow; J. Buckland, and J. Lackington, London, 1788)

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1788)

Thomas Gray, *Poems by Mr. Gray* (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1788)

James Thomson, *The Seasons* (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1788)

The British Chronologist, 3 vols (London: Printed for J. Lackington, 1789)

Voltaire, *The History of Charles the XIIth, King of Sweden*. (London: printed for J. Lackington, 1789)

Anders Sportman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, 2 vols (Perth: printed by R. Morison for R. Morison and Son, Perth; G. Mudie, Edinburgh; and J. Lackington, London, 1789)

Robert Blair, *The Grave* (Perth: Printed by R. Morison for R. Morison and Son, Perth; Geo. Mudie, Edinburgh; Ja Duncan, Glasgow; Wilson and Spence, York; and J. Lackington, London, 1790)

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DD\MKG 8 and 9, Papers of Meade-King Family

TPH\gc, Miscellaneous Copy of Somerset Documents

DD\SF, Sanford Family of Nymehead, Personal and Estate Papers

DD\XKIT, Various Somerset Deeds, Mainly from Taunton Area

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Electronic Resources

17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>

British Newspapers 1600–1900, <http://find.galegroup.com>

British Periodicals, <http://search.proquest.com>

Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>

Eighteenth-Century Online Collections,
<http://galenet.galegroup.com.libesproxy.open.ac.uk/servlet/ECCO>

I have used ECCO to access all the works listed in Appendix B

English Short Title Catalogue, <http://estc.bl.uk>

Exeter Working Papers in Book History, <http://bookhistory.blogspot.co.uk>

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